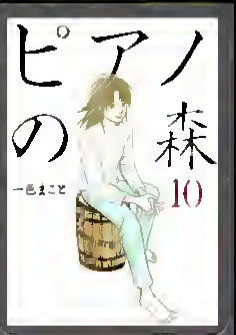
PIANO NO MORI

by Isshiki Makoto



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Piano No Mori Ch 95

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The Perfect World of KAI

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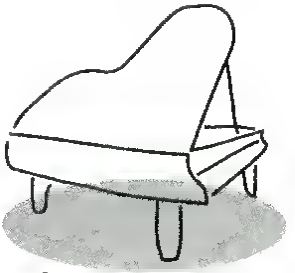
The Perfect World of KAI

12



The Perfect World of KAI

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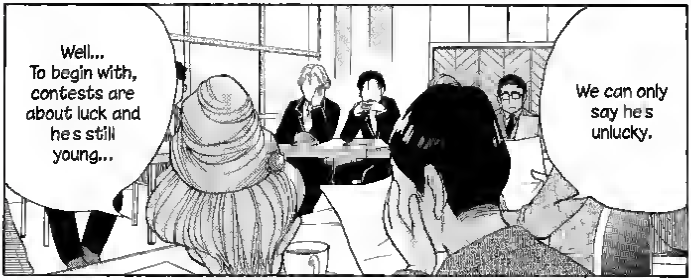
Chapter
95
The
Sound
of M

The cord broke so unexpectedly...
His performance was really outstanding.
It's such a shame for number 26, Ichinose Kai.
JUDGING IN PROGRESS. NO ENTRY.

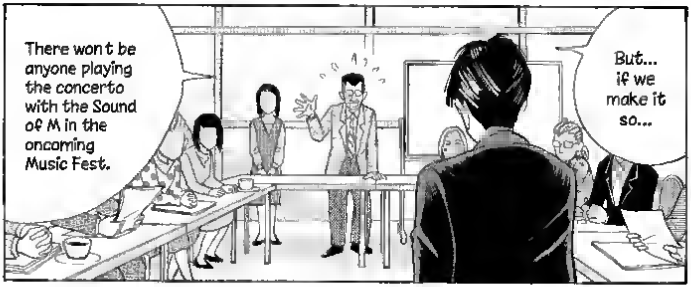

Well... To begin with, contests are about luck and he's still young...
We can only say he's unlucky.

.....
So we must reject him.

That is to say, this is a golden rule, which can't be broken.
... Because improvising is against contest rules.
That's right.
We can only feel sorry for his misfortune.
1 278 Points Yamashita
2 276 Points Ogata
3 275 Points Kasugai
4 270 Points Nagasaka
5 269 Points Toda
260 Points Shin
So...
This is the ranking of the top five candidates. Is it acceptable?
The performances of these five candidates were neck and neck. So, it won't be surprising no matter who comes first...
Meaning the ranks are solely determined by the scores.
2 276点 尾
3 275点 春
4 270点 長

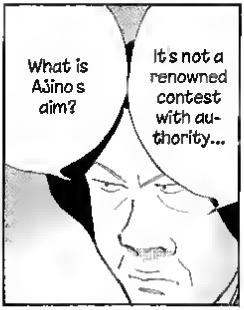
Excuse me...
If there are no objections...
How about you all from the Sound of M? Any objections?
Not likely
This Soloist Contest is just a flashy show
Eh?
1
2
3
4
5
This ranking is fine...
But can we set the first place this time as "not awarded"...
And fill the rest of the places following this sequence?

Again, this is the element of luck we talked about.
The original fifth-place candidate will be removed as a result...
It would be his misfortune...


There won't be anyone playing the concerto with the Sound of M in the oncoming Music Fest.
But... if we make it so...

Hmm... I think you have all forgotten...
Even that has to be cancelled this year?
There's no need to go so far even if there's no exceptional winner
Having no winner is simply unacceptable!!
Only the winner can perform the concerto with the Sound of M! It's the climax of the entire contest!

Still...
Why...

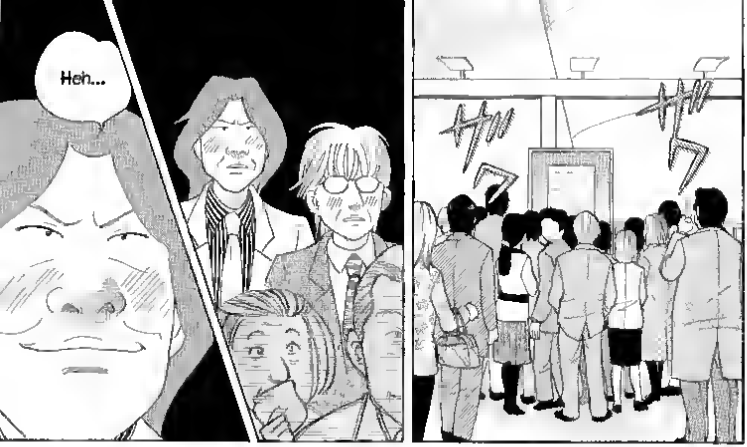

What is Ajino's aim?
It's not a renowned contest with authority...

Can it be that he's been saving up ever since he disappeared six years ago... No, that can't be it. Why this contest?

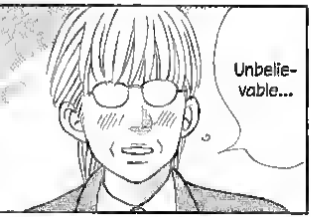
...has Ichinose joined this contest?

Come on. Let's check it out.

Really!?
The result is out!
It's out!


Heh...

Haha
haha
ha...


Unbelie-
vable...

Well done.

First Place: Not awarded
Third Place: Ogata Ryoku
Fourth Place: Kasugai Yuk
Fifth Place: Nagasaka Yo

Soloist Recommendation: Ichinose Kai

Hahaha...
It isn't even in the brochure.
That I thought it had been forgotten.
This award has not been presented for such a long time...

Oh. It's Ajino calling!
ヒルヒル
Ajino

Come back at once.
Kai?

Because you've been chosen as the soloist recommendation.
Why?
You can't laze around anymore.
We have to meet up with the Sound of M and sort things out immediately.

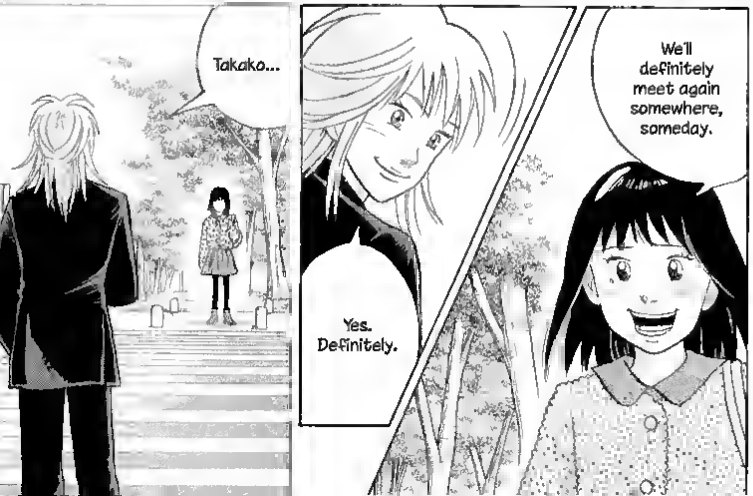
What is it?
Huh?
It's the award given by the Sound of M
WAAAAAAH~♡
I'VE BEEN CHOSEN AS THE SOLOIST RECOMMENDATION!!!
Waaaah~ Long live the Sound of M!!!♡
Congratulations.
Waaaah~ Kai, this is wonderful! As expected of the Sound of M!
They're not a bunch of old-fashioned geezers who value only traditions!!!

Congra-tulations!
Thank you.
Congra-tulations, sensei!!
Kai, just come back.
Awesome! Awesome! Awesome!
Ok! I'll be back right away.
So that means I can listen to Kai playing the concerto!
Oh... Thank you.
Congratulations, sensei!

Seri-
ously?
Oh no.
Im so
nervous.
I feel a
bit sick...
Hmm?
Try your
best!
Try your
best!
Don't
worry!
Just play
like you
always
do.
Yeah.
You'll be
ok right?
Are you
fine being
alone?
Kai, you
go on
first.
Finally
back.

Ok.
Thanks.
I'll try.
Try your best!
I'll be there listening.

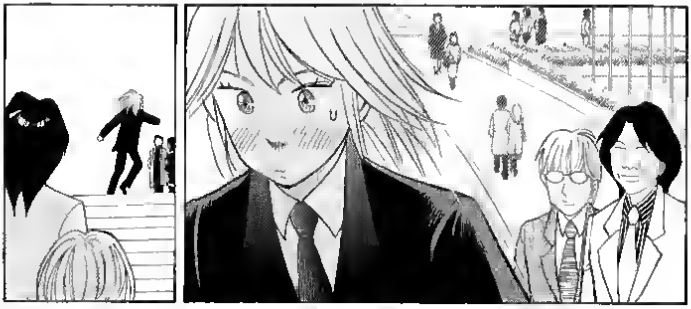
Kai!


Takako...
Yes.
Definitely.
We'll definitely meet again somewhere, someday.

Your hand...
Yes, I will!
Make sure you cure it properly!
Kai,
Try your best!

Ichinose.
Congra-tulations!
Ah... Thanks.

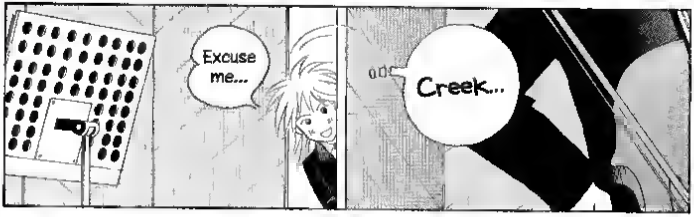
Thanks.
Congra-tulations!



Well then, See you!
Though Shiba-chan has someone who needs him very badly.
We're not needed at all when he's got Aúno with him.

Takako...
Wow!
So slow.
I nearly said "Welcome, sensei"...
That was close..
Who'd have thought I'd run into Saga-sensei here of all places!
That gave me such a fright!

That doesn't count as a reason.
Of course. You're the one they chose, after all.
I go in alone?


Excuse me...
Creek...

Congratulations! "Soloist recommendation" Number 1!
Ah, you're here.
The Sound of M-END

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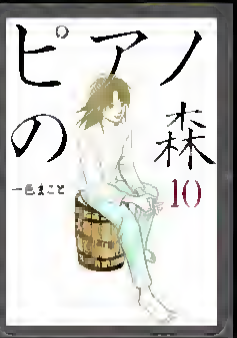

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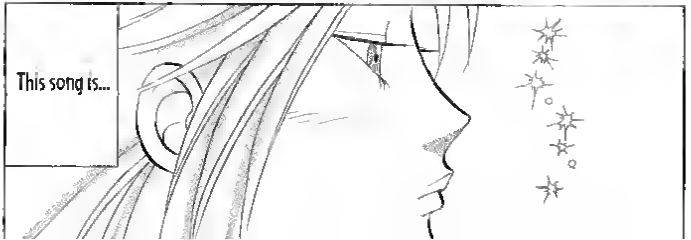
Chapter 96 J.J. Serrault

Welcome to the Sound of M!!
チパ
チパ
チパ
チパ
チパ
Th-...
Thank you for having me.
We wanted to throw a welcoming party but sadly there's no time.
Anyway, let's get on with it.
First, we'll have some tuning.
Let us hear you play once and we'll know how you want to get the song across!

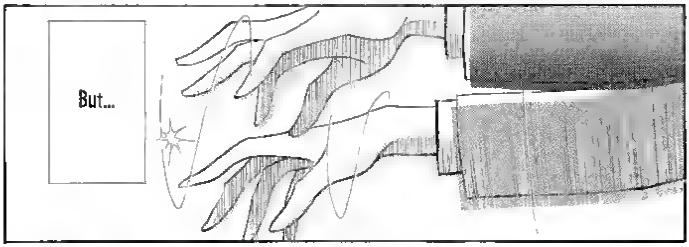
Come! Play as you please!
You don't have to mind our presence.
Yes.
We will attune ta your piana.
That's right. You don't have ta attune to us.
I'm so nervous...
すうはあ
Let us appreciate your talent properly!

The swinging baton...

The first note hops out...


This song is...

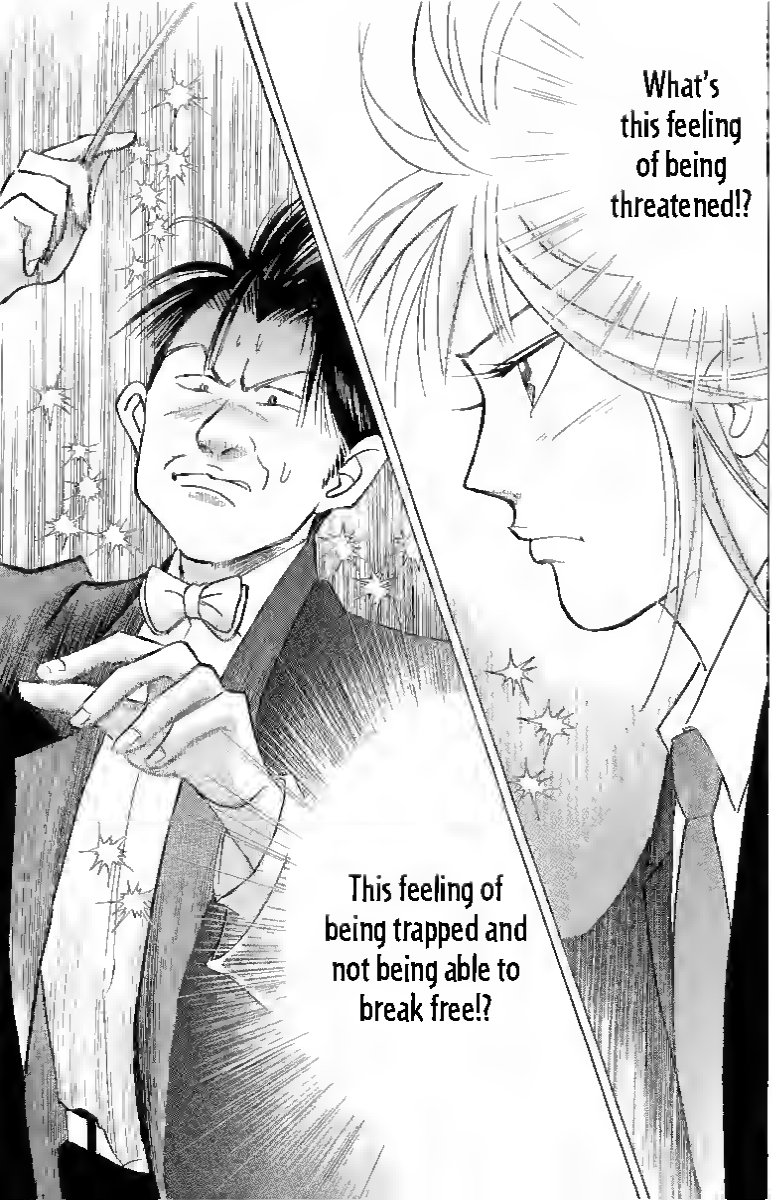
The one I've played many times while pretending to coordinate with an orchestra.

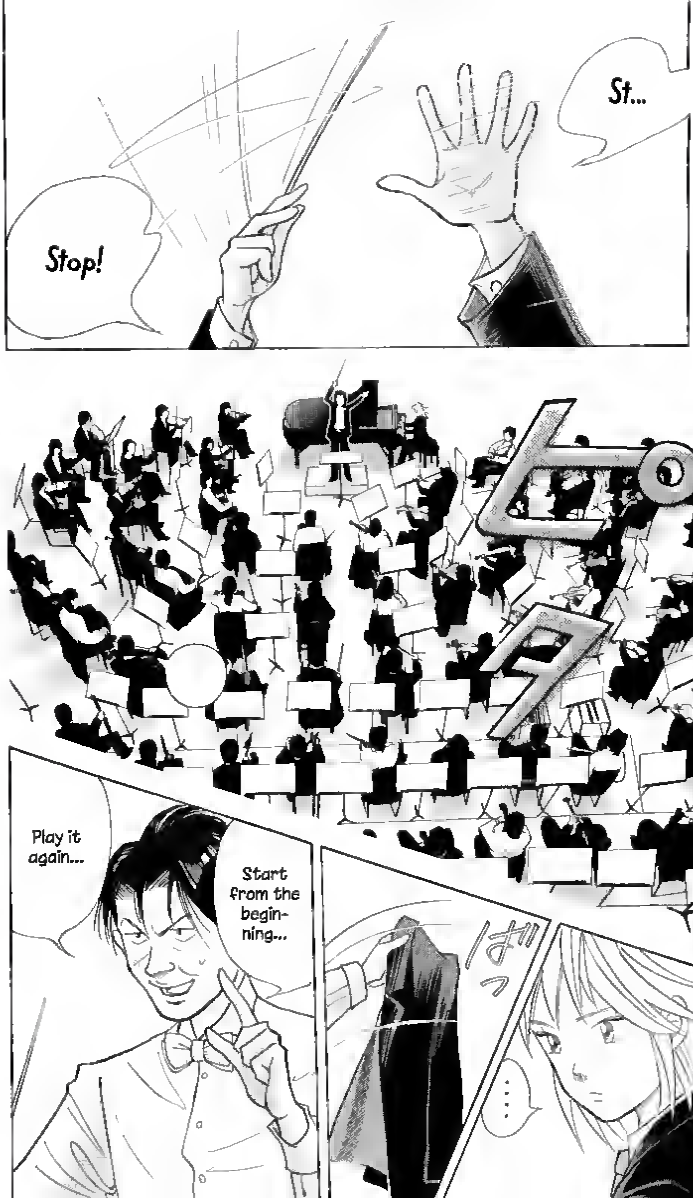

But...

The pi.
Is very different from just pretending...
Playing with an orchestra for real...

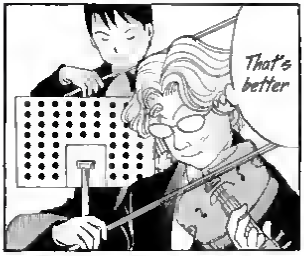
My ears were attracted to the sound of the piano and I lagged behind..
Urgh..
The piano. Isn't he playing too fast?
Is the tempo too fast?
What's with this sense of dis-harmony..
What's with this provocative piano!?
What is it...

Calm down.
You're professionals!
Calm.
Getting too emotional and messing up the tempo.
This often happens with young pianists!
What's with this sense of insecurity?
But...


What's this feeling of being threatened!?
This feeling of being trapped and not being able to break free!?


St...
Stop!
Play it again....
Start from the beginning...
ばっ
……

It doesn't seem to be a problem with the tempo...
Let's try quickening the tempo.


That's better

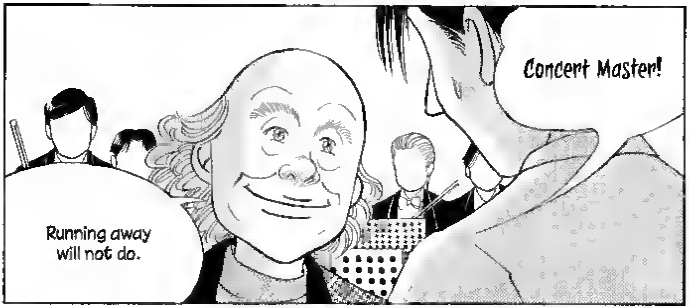
This feels good.
Ah~

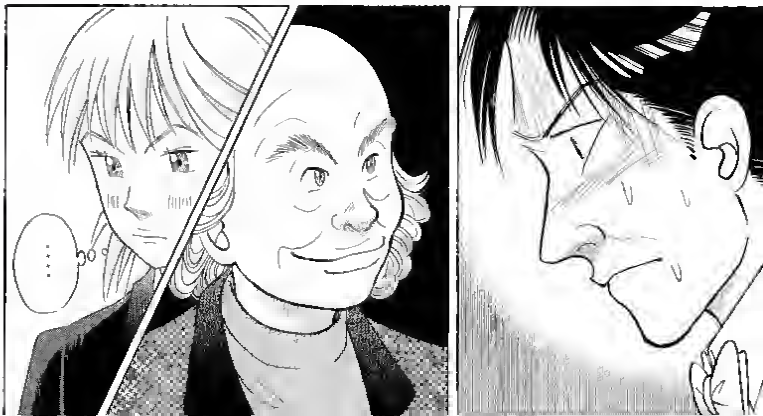
REHEARSAL IN PROGRESS. NO ENTRY!
...
So... What do you think, Monsieur Serrault!?
Keep this up and the performance in an hour will be perfect!
Hahaha! Ok! Ok!

Eh?
Jean-Jacques Serrault ...
He's the world-renowned Monsieur Jean-Jacques Serrault, a pianist and conductor. He'll be our temporary conductor this time.
Come with me!
Play it again like you did for the first time!
Well then. Start from the very beginning...
Nice to meet you.
Konnichiwa, Kai!
Japanese

You were attuning to the orchestra.
Kai... That wasn't your piano style when you played it the second time, was it?
French?
Monsieur Serrault, ce que vous dites... (what you said...)
The performance is only minutes away. I understand your agitation...
You didn't really mean that, did you?
He's still very young... Just concentrating on this extremely difficult piece is demanding enough. How could he possibly attune to us?

You shouldn't have chosen him if you're planning to deliver a well-done performance.
Why did you choose him?


Concert Master!
Running away will not do.


.....

Please give me 20 minutes...
I need some time to discuss some adjustments with everyone...
10 minutes.
... Deal. 10 minutes it is.
Then I'll leave it to you all.
You must unite everyone.
No worries!
My orchestration will surely delight you.

Yes, Sir!
Trust them. Give it all you've got.
Kai! Don't worry. They're 'professionals'!
パチパチパチパチパチパチパチパチ
J=J・セロ— END

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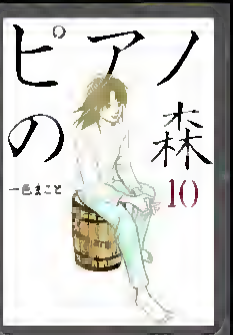

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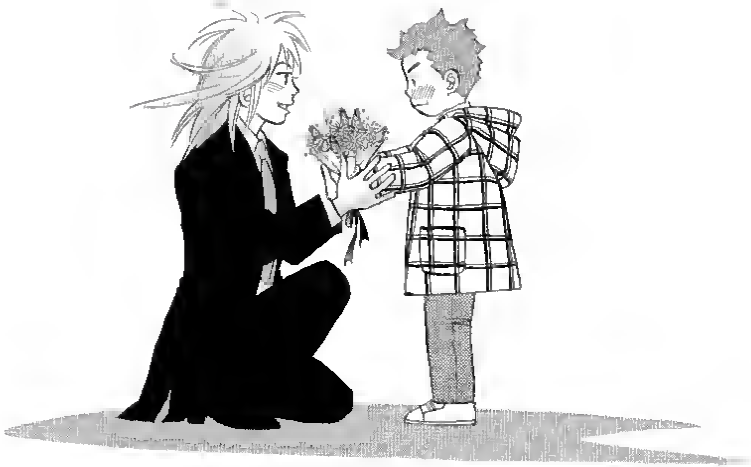
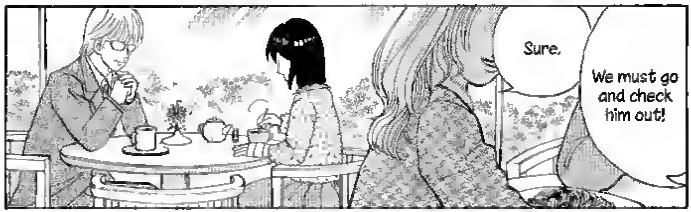


Chapter 97 Ajino's Aim

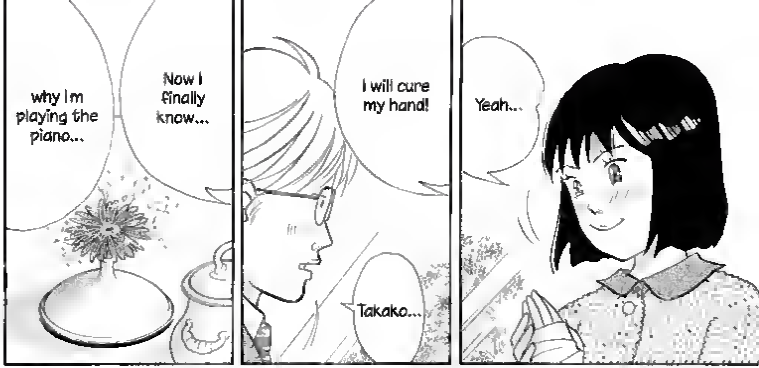
Beppu Winter Music Fest
Hey, did you hear?
They gave out the Soloist Recommendation for the first time...
Yeah, I heard! To a 16-year-old pretty boy!
JAPAN

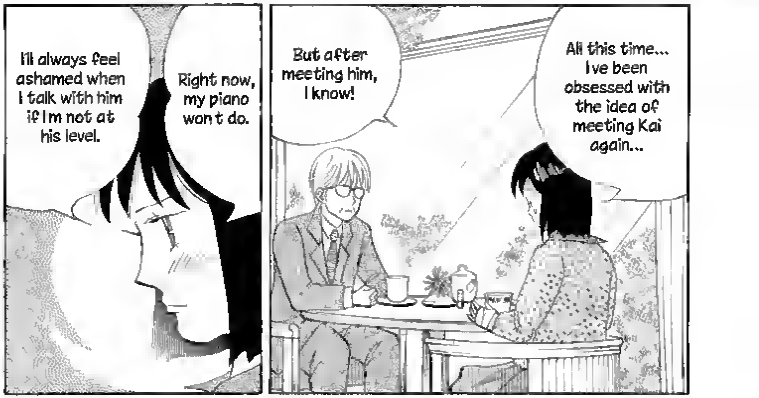
*SIGNBOARD: JAPAN SOLOIST CONTEST IN BEPPU



Those who understand music will appreciate his piano after hearing him play!
Kai's piano really is brilliant. But it's so sad that people only care about his looks.

Another 30 minutes to go.
Still, I'm so happy I can listen to Kai's piano again!
I guess you're right.
Takako...
Thank you very much, sensei.
I'm glad we're here!
I know you can do it!
You can join all sorts of contest once your hand is healed.
You must cure your tendonitis!


why I'm playing the piano...
Now I finally know...
I will cure my hand!
Takako...
Yeah...


I'll always feel ashamed when I talk with him if I'm not at his level.
Right now, my piano won't do.
But after meeting him, I know!
All this time... I've been obsessed with the idea of meeting Kai again...

Because I have Shiba-sensei with me!
Don't worry. I can definitely do it!

パチパチパチパチパチパチ
Sorry for the long wait!
Is the first winner of the 'Soloist Recommendation', Ichinose Kai-san.
The performer playing the concerto with the Sound of M this time ..
Jean-Jacques Serrault
Serrault is the conductor!?
Wow-♡ Seriously?
Jean-Jacques Serrault
And the conductor is the famous pianist-conductor.

Did he say "Serrault"!?
This is Ajino's aim!?
Is that it!? So this is...
Is...

I couldn't fathom why he let Ichinose join this contest...
Turns...
Turns out he did that so Ichinose can meet Serrault?!
Kai...
Concen-trate.
My heart...
Feels like it's gonna break my rib cage.
ドクン
ドクン
ドクン

Kai!
Ah...
No reason for stage fright.
Think of the audience as trees and bushes...
Huh?
Just imagine you're playing the piano in a forest.

Settle your nerves!

Focus with all your might...

Just...

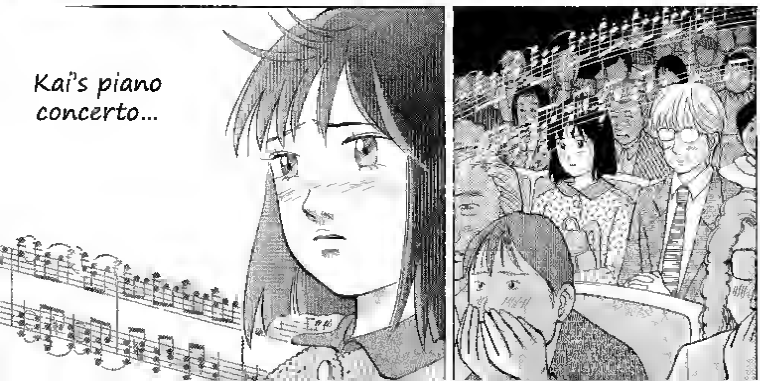
Focus.
Calm...
Calm...

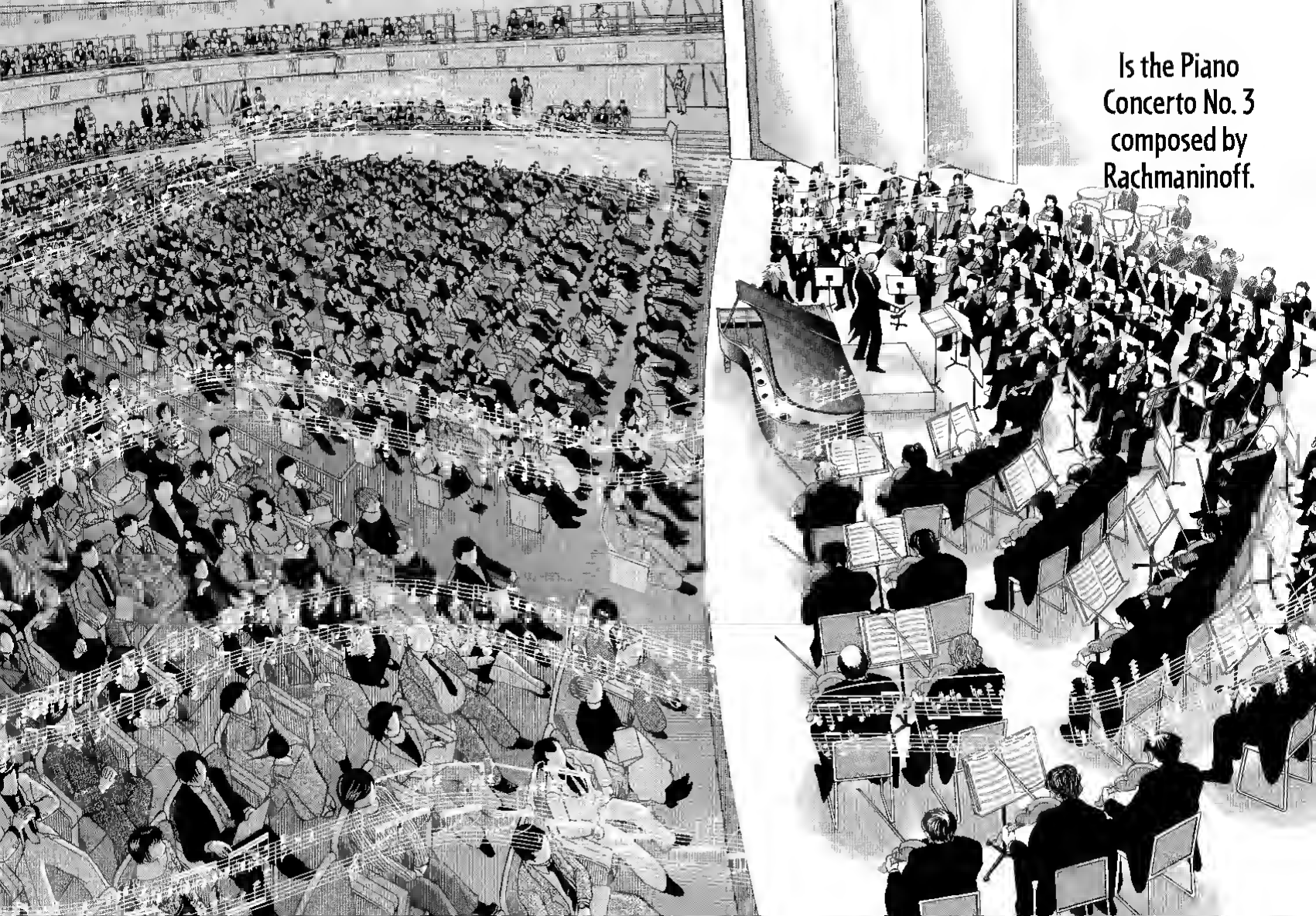
Trust me!
Calms me.
Just playing the first notes...
In that moment when all breath is withheld...

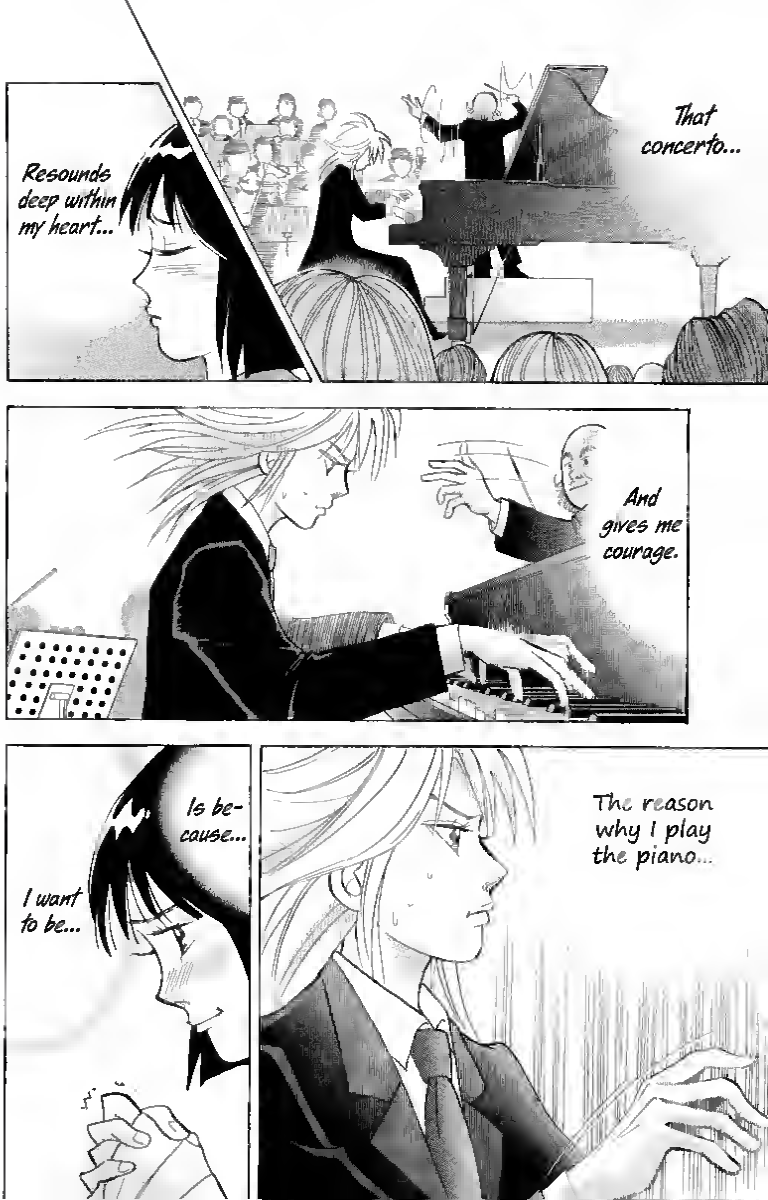
Trust Monsieur Serrault
And follow the piano!
Though the piano is like a young and wild mustang...
No one fell from its back.

Passion keeps pouring out,
The piano's...

And makes us soar.


Kai's piano concerto...


Is the Piano
Concerto No. 3
composed by
Rachmaninoff.


That concerto...
Resounds deep within my heart...
And gives me courage.
The reason why I play the piano...
Is because...
I want to be...

No!
Up there!
どぉぉぉ

I have to be up there!!
This is for the oniichan playing the piano...

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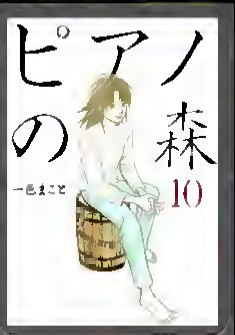

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Chapter 98 Serrault and Ajino

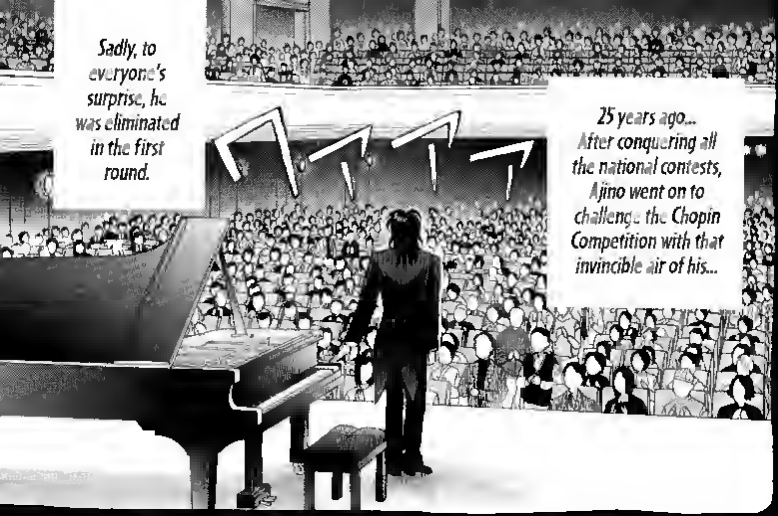
So...
How was today's concerto?
How should I put it...?
It was... really nerve-wracking and exhila-rating.
Thank you very much.
Hahaha. That's great!
Sousuke ...
It's been a long time, Monsieur Serrault.
I'm so glad to see you in such good health.

You're in good shape too! You look younger.
Don't give me all that formality. Just call me by my name.
Were friends...
Though I already knew these two...
I invited him here on purpose.
That was not by chance.
Was still a hell of a shock, even though it was only by chance.
But to perform on the same stage with the world-league Monsier Serrault like that...
Oh man. I suddenly feel very touched...

I...
Aha, That's right!

My early departure from the Music Fest to follow Monsieur Serrault all the way to Fukuoka was worthwhile.
Have just witnessed an incredible scene.

Dates back to 25 years ago.
Ajino and Jean-Jacques Serrault's friendship ...
As... As expected, he's come to meet up with Ajino!!


Sadly, to everyone's surprise, he was eliminated in the first round.
25 years ago... After conquering all the national contests, Ajino went on to challenge the Chopin Competition with that invincible air of his...

He's never been a juror ever since then.
However, Serrault, one of the jurors then, vehemently objected to Ajino's elimination and resigned from the jury panel...

He was thrust into the limelight because of Serrault's shocking resignation.
On the other hand, although Ajino lost in the first round,

Losing the Chopin Competition...

Made him more famous both in Japan and internationally than winning it...

But, his glorious days as a celebrity were short... That accident effectively put an end to Ajino's career as a pianist.

According to some accounts, in order to reopen Ajino's sealed heart, Serrault tried really hard to learn Japanese...

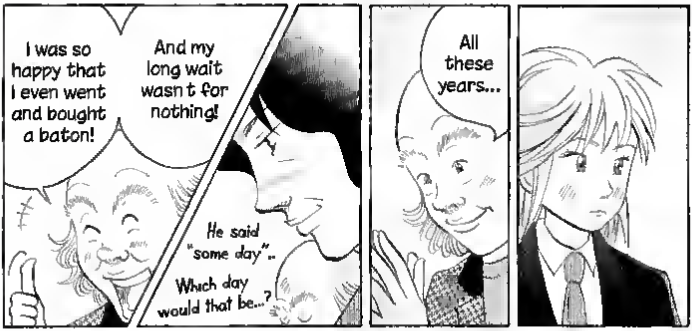
Reading about that really broke my young and tender heart

Jean-Jacques... Serrault...

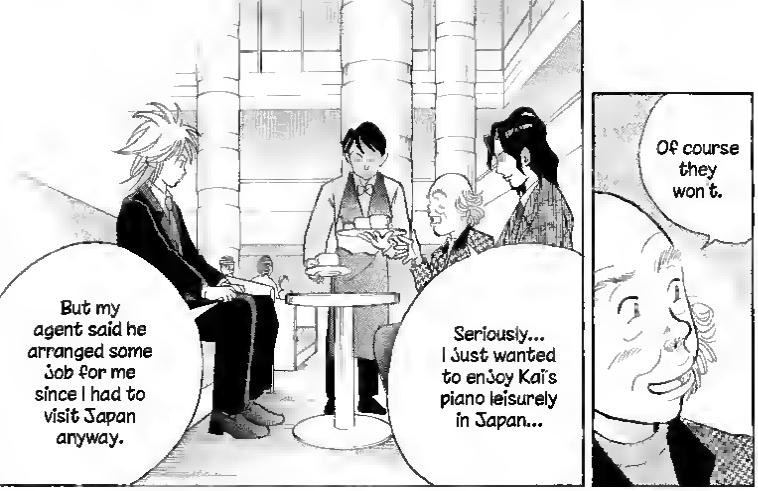
Text in magazine: Oct. Tower House Ekimae of Sumi

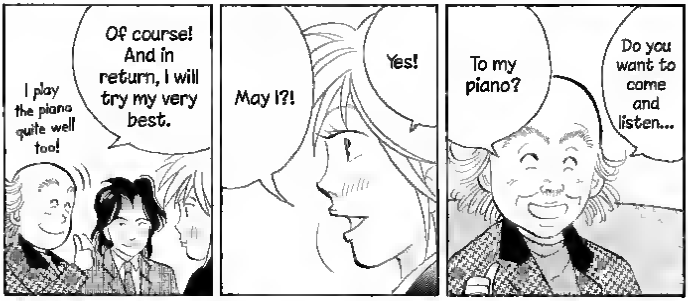
Are right there, right now!!
Those two men...
Menu
Out of the blue!
That really wasn't a laughing matter! I received a letter from Sousuke, who had completely disappeared for years...
A short but meaningful letter like that.
"I really want you to listen to his piano some day."
"I picked up a boy from the forest. The piano I left in the forest to rot nurtured him."
That didn't count as "picked up", right?

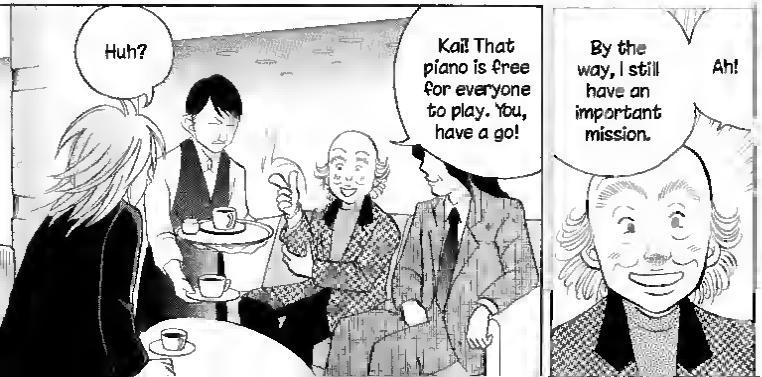
Meeting you and listening to your piano.
That's why I've always been looking forward to...
That's the most suitable word.
Ahaha. Don't be mad.


I was so happy that I even went and bought a baton!
And my long wait wasn't for nothing!
He said "some day"..
Which day would that be...?
All these years...

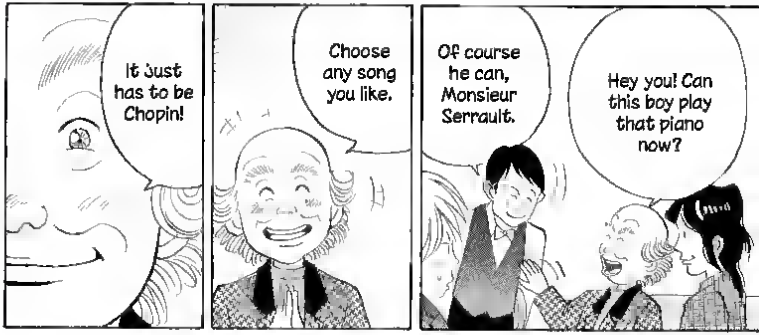
Still... I'm a bit worried that the performances tomorrow and the day after won't be sensational enough.
Ah no, I was too excited.
How lucky!
Thank you.

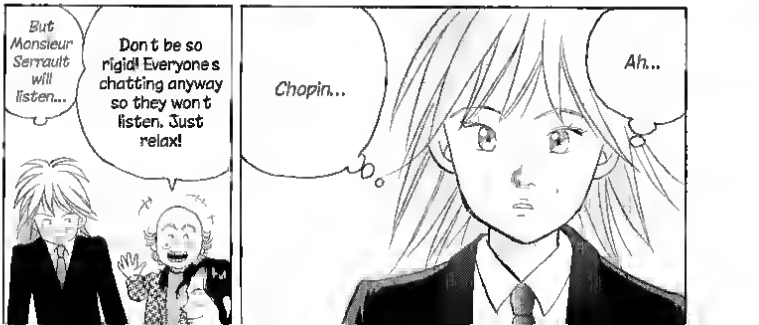

But my agent said he arranged some Job for me since I had to visit Japan anyway.
Seriously... I Just wanted to enJoy Kaï's piano leisurely in Japan...
Of course they won't.


I play the piano quite well too!
Of course! And in return, I will try my very best.
May I?!
Yes!
To my piano?
Do you want to come and listen...


Huh?
Kaï! That piano is free for everyone to play. You, have a go!
By the way, I still have an important mission.
Ah!

SFX: CHATTER CHATTER CHATTER AHAHAHA


It just has to be Chopin!
Choose any song you like.
Of course he can, Monsieur Serrault.
Hey you! Can this boy play that piano now?



Ahaha...
Chatter Chatter
Ichinose is going to play!?
ガヤ ガヤ ガヤ
Chopin ...
Chopin ...
Chopin ...
Chopin...
This song is...

Such luck. I get to listen to Ichinose's Chopin!
This is "Grande polonaise brillante".
Chopin?
For God's sake, shut up!
Please. Be quiet.
AHAHA..
SQUEAK
SQUEAK
This is the best part!
Wha... What is it, Ariyoshi!?
Waaaah!
Master!

That's because Monsieur Serrault just dropped in temporarily... Moreover, that Music Fest has always been ignored by the press.
But the conductor was no other than Jean-Jacques Serrault!
What?
It seems that nobody recorded the performance...
Now is not the time for this kind of thing, Master!
Nope.
The local TV station?
What about the venue?
How can this be...?
How ...
And didn't film the venue...
It just so happened that the local TV channel was interviewing another participant...
That's down right unbelievable. It would probably be a prized treasure to the Sound of M...
There aren't any recordings of Ichinose and the Sound of M's concerto...

I couldn't buy the tickets for Serrault's performances tomorrow and the day after that.
There's one more thing...
What thing!?
Have you made use of all my connections?
The tickets were sold out ten minutes after the public offer. If it were three days ago, we might have managed to clinch a VIP seat.
I have to get them even if it means buying scalped tickets!
Stop kidding!!

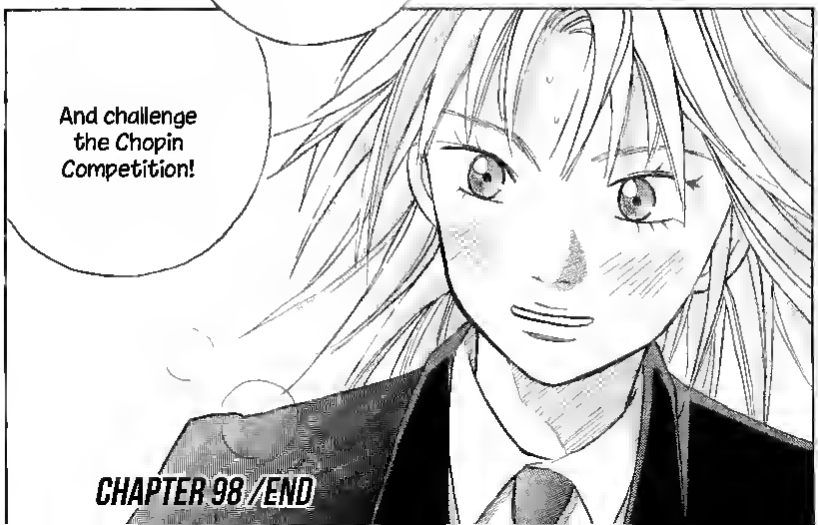
You're not going to say that my Mercedes was hijacked because I parked it on the roadside, are you?
Ah... about the car...
So... You're asking me to sleep in the car!? Hey...
Since it's all so sudden, I couldn't even book a hotel room for today...
Ma... Master, that's not all...
I think... It'll be found immediately! It'll be transported back here right away...
Calm down. Please calm down. I'm sure...

But this time, the one going on stage will not be myself as I was 25 years ago...
Hmm...
But he might follow in your footsteps...

Sousuke...

The mandatary recommendation letter for the competition... I'm more than happy to write it for him.

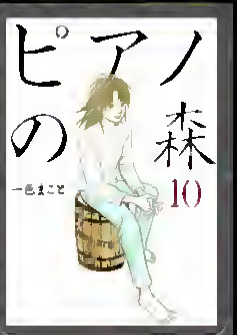
It'll be Kai; one year older.
In just a year, he can...
He'll manage ...
Go, Sousuke!



CHAPTER 98 /END

PIANO NO MORI

by Isshiki Makoto



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Piano No Mori Ch 99

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Chapter 99

Recommendation Letter

Sfx: Hustle hustle hustle

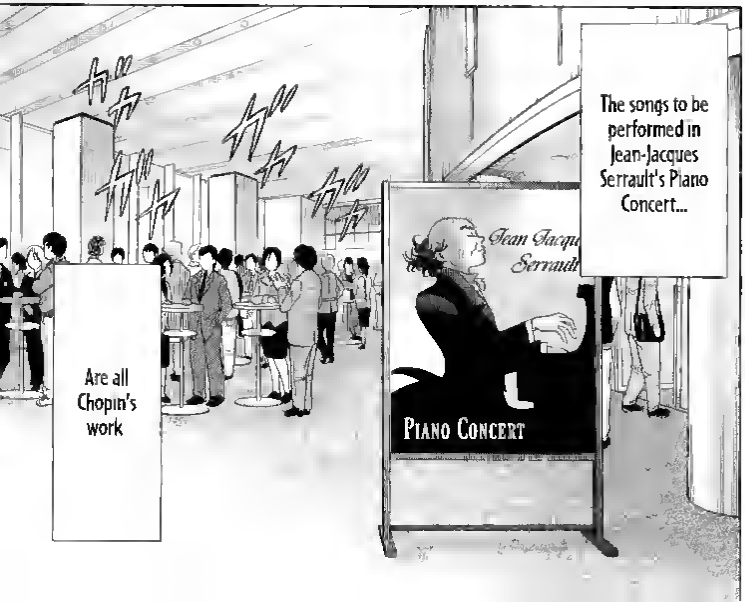
IT'S A BARGAIN! IT'S A BARGAIN! ANY EXTRA TICKETS? I'M BUYING THEM!
BUYING TICKETS! BUYING TICKETS! IF YOU HAVE AN EXTRA TICKET, SELL IT TO ME!

Sfx: Clop clop clop

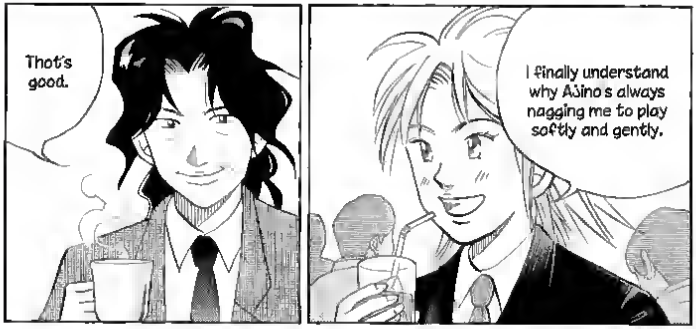
Even the scalpers are shouting "Buying tickets". Nobody's shouting "Selling tickets" at all.
Won't... It won't work, master.
Hah hah..

Please sell me a ticket!
Tomorrow! We'll definitely get a ticket tomorrow!
To...
So you're saying these fine flowers have to go to waste?

S6: Chatter chatter chatter...



It's the first time I've ever heard such soft and gentle piano.
So soft and so gentle...
All the Chopin I've heard before pales in comparison.
It was terrific.

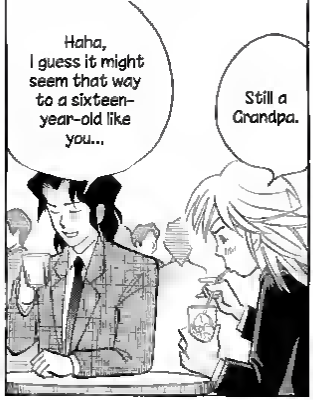

That's good.
I finally understand why Ajino's always nagging me to play softly and gently.

He's just past 70, I think.
He hasn't really reached the age to be called Grandpa.

Haha...
Anyway, how old is Grandpa Jean?

.....

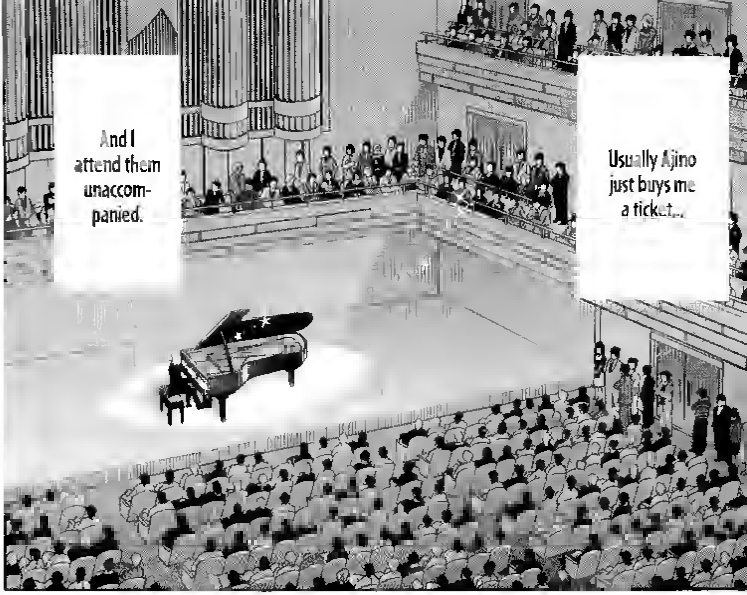
Let's go back. The second part is about to begin.


Haha, I guess it might seem that way to a sixteen-year-old like you...
Still a Grandpa.

Attending a piano concert with Ajino

But when it comes to piano concerts
Ajino has taken me to many places

This is a first


And I attend them unaccompanied.
Usually Ajino just buys me a ticket...

Ajino
...

It's difficult for him to be in places like this, isn't it ?

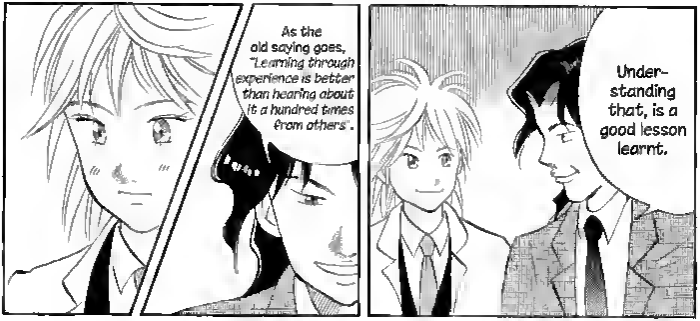
But he can no longer return to that place...
Ajmo is clearly younger than Serrault...

Join in and play Chopin's song...

His fingers...
Unconsciously...

Really want to play the piano themselves.
Ajino's fingers...
Ajino.
Sfx Clap clap clap clap
パチ
パチパチ
パチ
パチ
パチパチ
パチ
パチ
パチパチ
パチ
パチ
パ

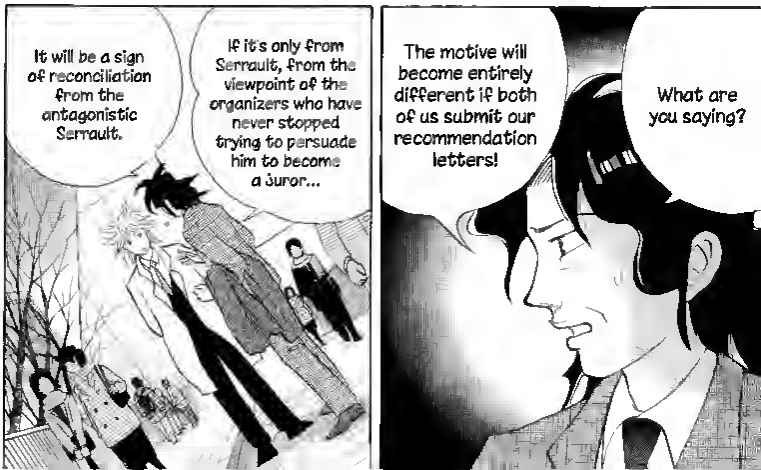
The pianissimo is the key.
Sadly, there isn't a single pianist with a character that surpasses him to this very day.
It's been a long time, but Serrault is most certainly amazing.


As the old saying goes, "Learning through experience is better than hearing about it a hundred times from others".
Understanding that, is a good lesson learnt.

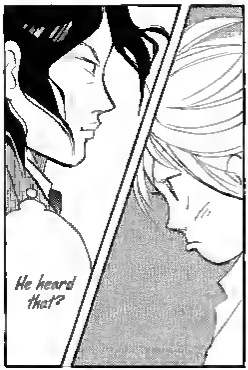
Last night, Serrault... said he would write me the recommendation letter for the Chopin Competition.
What is it?

The other person is my senior from Kiriyama Music University. He readily agreed to help.
But don't I need recommendations from two musicians?
Hmm... That's great. You passed!

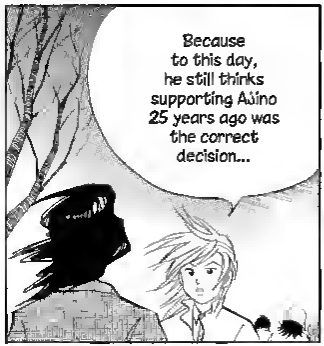
I want Ajino to write it.
But the other recommendation letter...

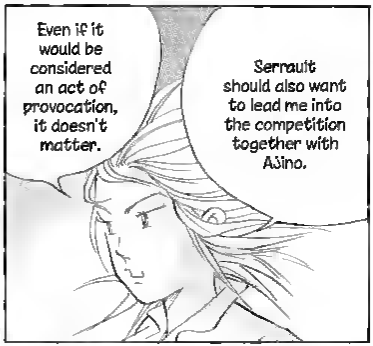

It will be a sign of reconciliation from the antagonistic Serrault.
If it's only from Serrault, from the viewpoint of the organizers who have never stopped trying to persuade him to become a juror...
The motive will become entirely different if both of us submit our recommendation letters!
What are you saying?

If things really come down ta that...
It will laak like a provocatian to the Chopin Competition, and that won't be taken lightly.
But... If we submitted it together...
So it makes na difference whether Aäino writes it ar nat.
But I... I will declare that Aäino is my teacher in my self-recam-mendatian anyway!
Your relatianship with the Jurors will also be affected.
Not only will Serrault's sign af re-conciliatian be ruined...
"No, I decline I don't want to disadvantage Kai."
"I would like us both to endorse together so long as Kai has no issues with that."
Kai...
I dan't think Serrault cares about recanciliation anymare.


He heard that?

No...
I didn't.
Didn't you say that?


Because to this day, he still thinks supporting Ajino 25 years ago was the correct decision...


Even if it would be considered an act of provocation, it doesn't matter.
Serrault should also want to lead me into the competition together with Ajino.

I don't need you to tell me that.

Because he believes in himself.

Then it's all settled.
I will join the competition on Ajino's and Serrault's recommendations.
I'm not looking for trouble.
But even if that is the case, I will still win!
I'LL DEFINITELY WIN!
Don't be absurd!
You shouldn't underestimate the Chopin Competition.
Sensei shouldn't underestimate me either.

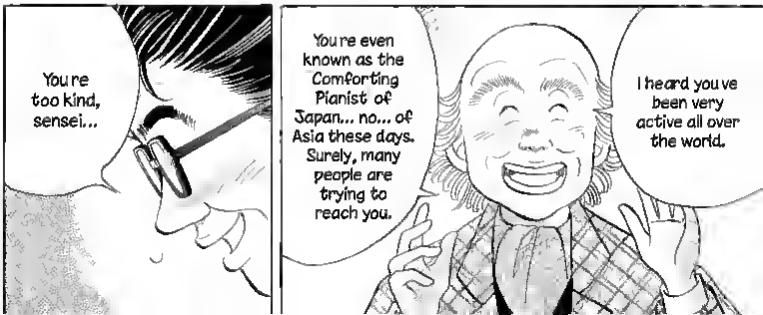
GRAND R HOTEL

Then please feel free to summon me if you need anything.
Thanks.
Not at all! I'm feeling terrific!
Aren't you tired, Monsieur?

キィー
Welcome.
Oh! You're Amamiya-san.
Hi!
May I see Monsieur Serrault?
Yes, of course you may!
Never thought I'd see you here. How lucky!!

Monsieur Serrault!
Long time no see!
You're Amamiya.
When I heard that Monsieur Serrault is having a concert in Japan...
I was so happy that I flew back here right away!

I couldn't get a hand on a platinum ticket today.
But I have a ticket for tomorrow.
Haha... Never thought this kind of thing would happen to a famous pianist like you.
But I'm very glad you've come to visit me.


I heard you've been very active all over the world.
You're even known as the Comforting Pianist of Japan... no... of Asia these days. Surely, many people are trying to reach you.
You're too kind, sensei...

Actually, there's something I would like to discuss with sensei...
Or rather, to request sensei's opinion...
Anyway, please take a seat.
Get a drink for him...
It's a recommendation letter for the Chopin Competition.
It's just a draft. A draft.
Ah...
Monsieur Serrault, that is...?
So Serrault has already reconciled with the organizer!?
Did he say Chopin Competition!?

Kai... Ichinose...
Kai Ichinose
!!
What a coincidence. Actually, I want to talk to you about the Chopin Competition...

ICHINOSE KAI!?
Kai Ichinose
ICHI...

Ichinose Kai is joining the Chopin Competition!?
Eh? You know Kai, Amamiya?
推薦状 END

PIANO NO MORI

by Isshiki Makoto

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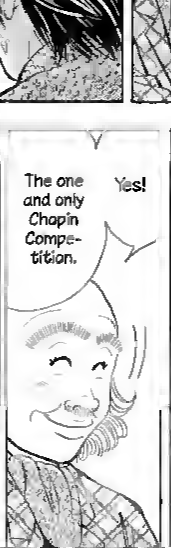
Chapter 100 Determination in Salzburg

It would come down to this..
I've never thought that...
Though I knew about the relationship between Ajino and Serrault...

Ah... I see.
No... Not directly. He is a friend of my son.

You know Koi, Amamiya?

He just won the "Soloist Recommendation" in the Soloist Contest a few days ago, and staged a brilliant performance of Rachmaninoff's 'Concerto No.3' together with the Sound of M.
Kai will turn 17 on the day of the competition...


The one and only Chopin Competition.
Yes!

You see, there are numerous competitions named after Chopin... So I'm wondering if you're referring to the Chopin Competition?
Monsieur Serrault,

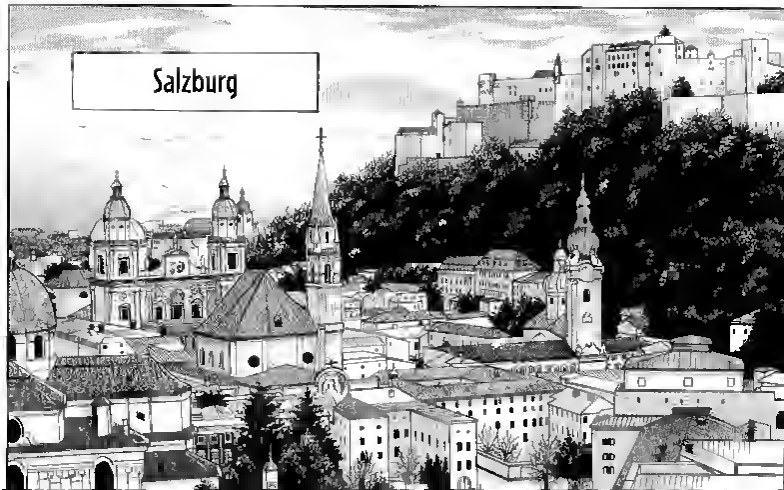
Ichinose Kai performed Rachmaninoff with the Sound of M.

Is finally making his move.
Ajino...

Onto the stage of the Chopin Competition!
He wants to send Ichinose...

He even has the world-league Jean-Jacques Serrault's support!!
That's not all...

So, what does Amamiya want to discuss with me?
Ah... no. Nothing.
GRAND R. HOTEL

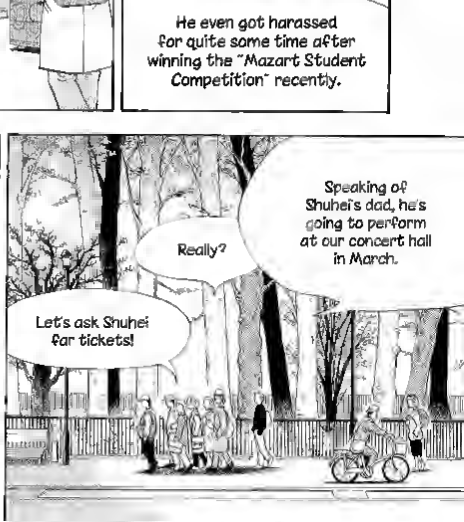

Salzburg

Shuhei! You're amazing! You've been chosen as the soloist for the next regular concert! Look!
He's totally invincible after coming out of his slump!
I'm just lucky.
Sorry! I have to go. I'll see you tomorrow!
Eh? It's that late already?
It's about time for your interview.
Shuhei-kun.

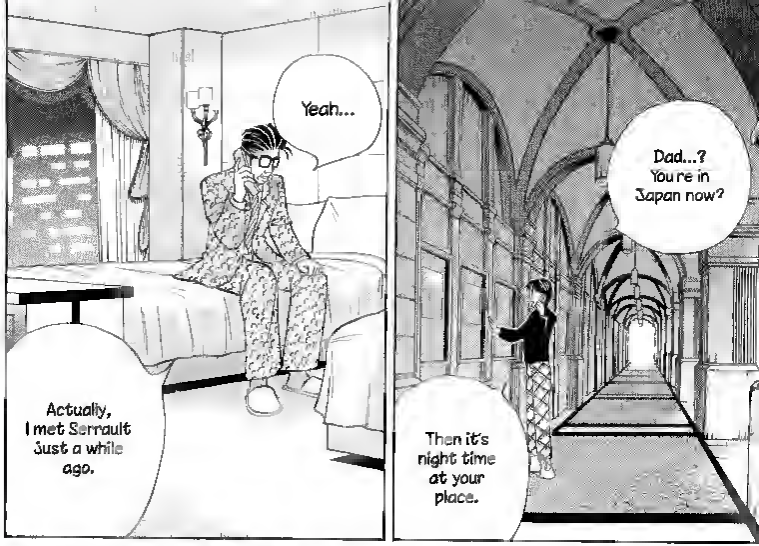
That must be really tiring...
He'll be even busier next month when the filming for the documentary begins.
Shuhei... Another guest from Japan?

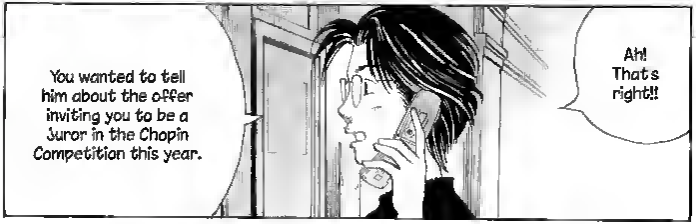
Sigh. I kinda envy him, but I always tell myself to forget it cause I'll never be able to endure all that hard work...
He even got harassed for quite some time after winning the "Mazart Student Competition" recently.

Sfx Flash Flash



Did listening to your father playing the piano in your childhood...
Have a significant influence on you?
Certainly. Though I never realized that consciously...
Perhaps I don't hate situations like this as much as others might think.
Sfx: Flash
That said, many interviewers come severely unprepared
Can't you ask something more interesting?
Sometimes... I really want to tell them to do some research before coming...
Still, I've been used to the attention since I was little...
And more importantly, I enjoy reading articles about myself a lot.
Shuhei-kun.
There is a call from your father in Japan.
Dad?


Yeah...
Actually, I met Serrault just a while ago.
Dad...? You're in Japan now?
Then it's night time at your place.


You wanted to tell him about the offer inviting you to be a Juror in the Chopin Competition this year.
Ah! That's right!!

Because I don't know... whether I should accept the offer.
Eh? Why!?
But in the end I couldn't bring myself to tell him.
That's what I originally planned to do...

What are you talking about? Of course you should accept it!
Such an honor is long overdue for you, Dad.
Shuhei...
The... the truth is... The Chopin Competition in October next year...
Ichinose Kai will be a participant
DA... DAD.
DI... DID YOU JUST...?

I originally intended to visit Serrault and ask for his opinion, but I ran into him when he was writing Ichinose Kai's recommendation letter...
I said Ichinose would participate in the upcoming Chopin Competition.

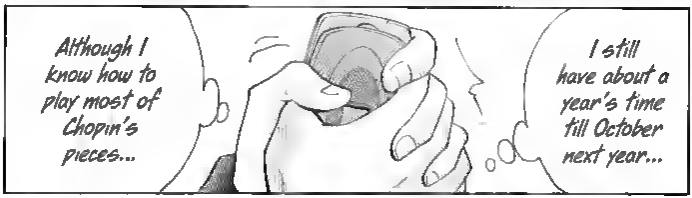
And performed Rachmaninoff's Concerto No.3 with the Sound of M.
I heard Ichinose won the Soloist Recommendation at the competition in Kyushu,

DAD... I'LL CALL YOU BACK LATER.
DA...
I'm sorry. I'm in the middle of an interview.
Shuhei... Should I accept the juror offer?
TH-THUMP
TH-THUMP
Too early.
That's why too early.

Kai...
Kai...
Sfx: Snap
Is going to enter the Chopin Competition!!
TH-THUMP
TH-THUMP
TH-THUMP
TH-THUMP

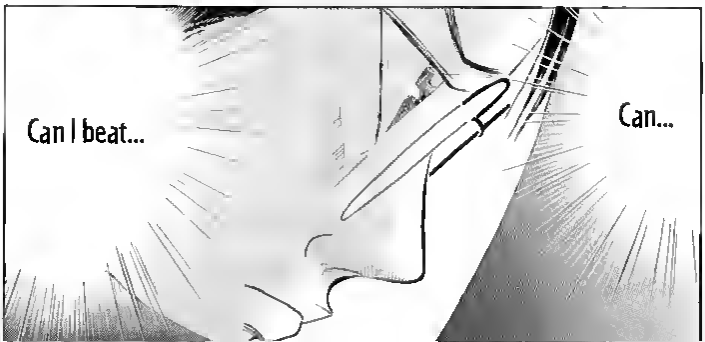
Will I make it in time for the Chopin Competition!?

Will it be too late if I start now!?
I thought he was going to enter it five years later.
What should I do?


Although I know how to play most of Chopin's pieces...
I still have about a year's time till October next year...

Be prepared enough to enter the Chopin Competition!?
But can I...

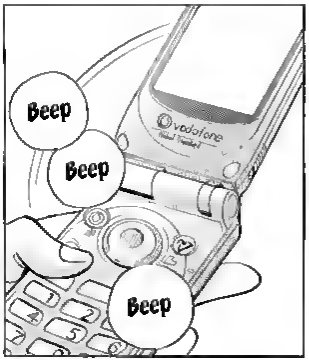
And he has not only Ajino, but also the world-class Serrault by his side!
But Kai is already on the move.


Can I beat...
Can...

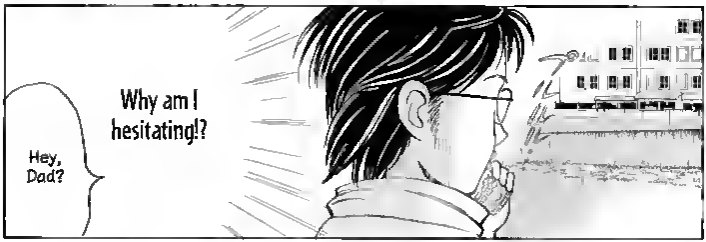
Ichinose
Kai!?

Kiriyama Mu

No.
What I'm saying is... you should wait for a year till he is no longer occupied before consulting with Ichinose himself about matters concerning the contract!
S... So... You're saying we have to wait a whole year before Ichinose can join the Sound of I'n as an official 'soloist'...!?
CAN HE...!?
Before that happens, for him to collaborate with you again...
If you agree to let him play nothing but Chopin, then yes, he can.
We...
We have absolutely no problem with that.



IF YOU EVER NEED OUR HELP BEFORE THE COMPETITION, PLEASE DON'T HESITATE TO ASK...
THANK YOU VERY MUCH!!
Then please don't go easy on him.



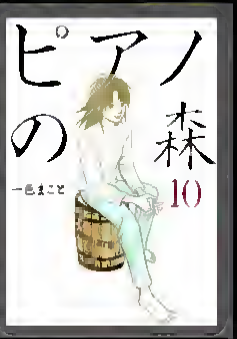
Sfx Doo doo doo...

Yes! I've decided to enter the Chopin Competition.
I have more than enough time...
Of course I'm fine with that... But Shuhei, you...
Dad...
I won't run away anymore.
And I absolutely won't lose!!
I can't help but feel... I, too...

ザルツブルグの決意 END

PIANO NO MORI

by Isshiki Makoto



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Piano No Mori Ch 101

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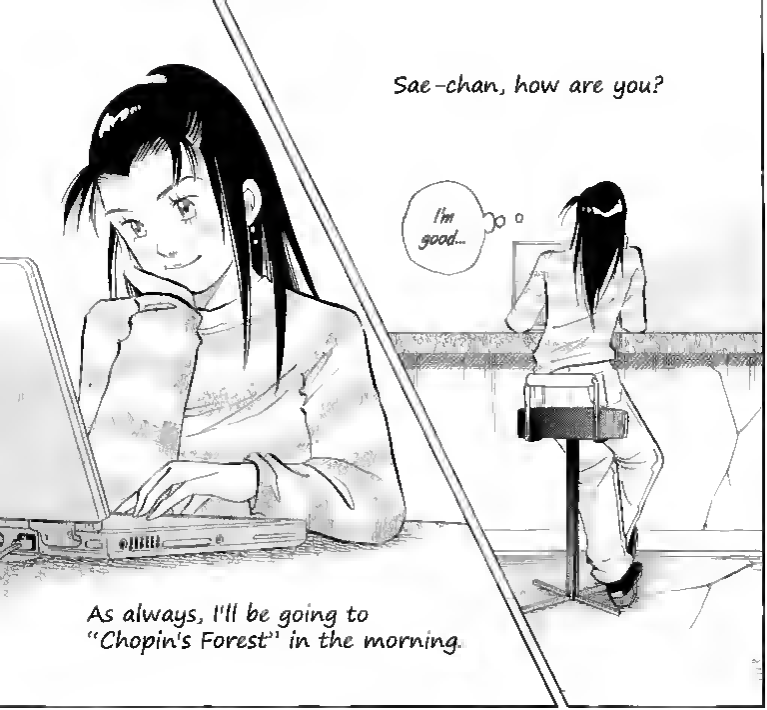
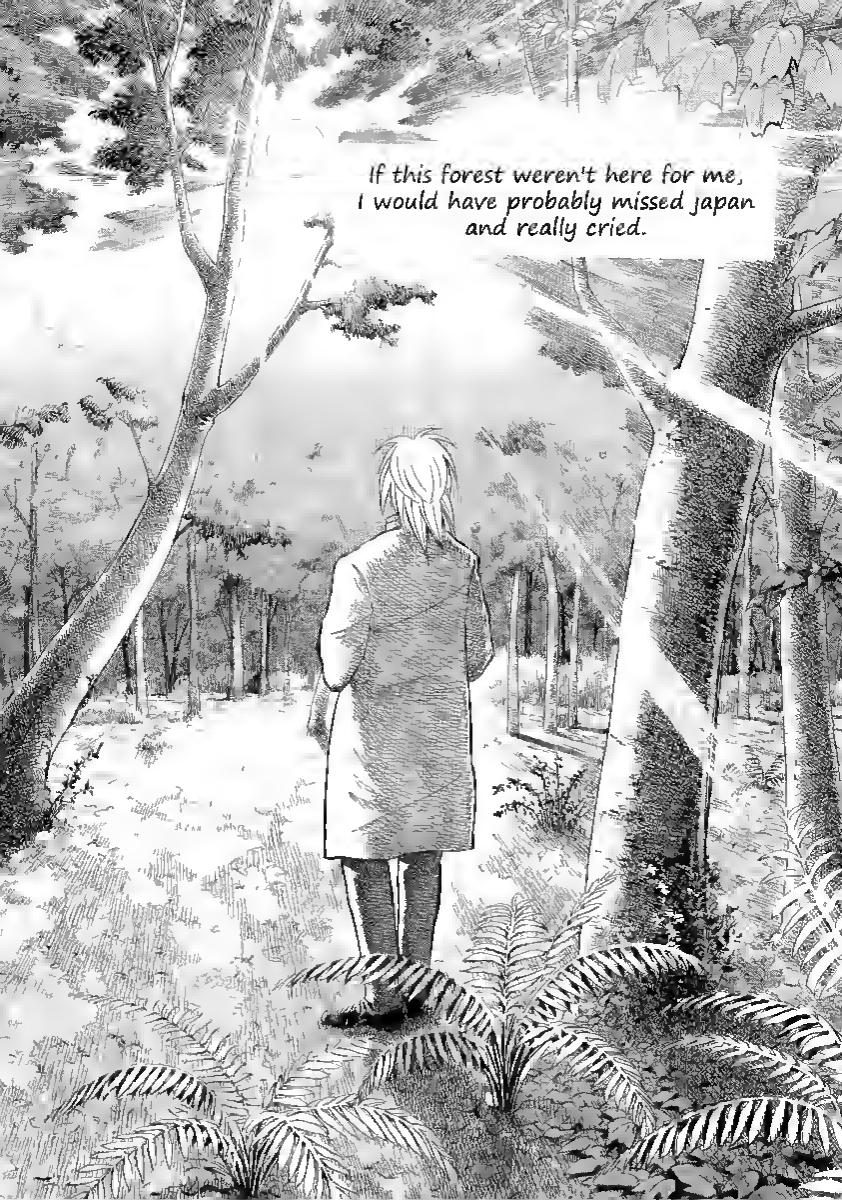
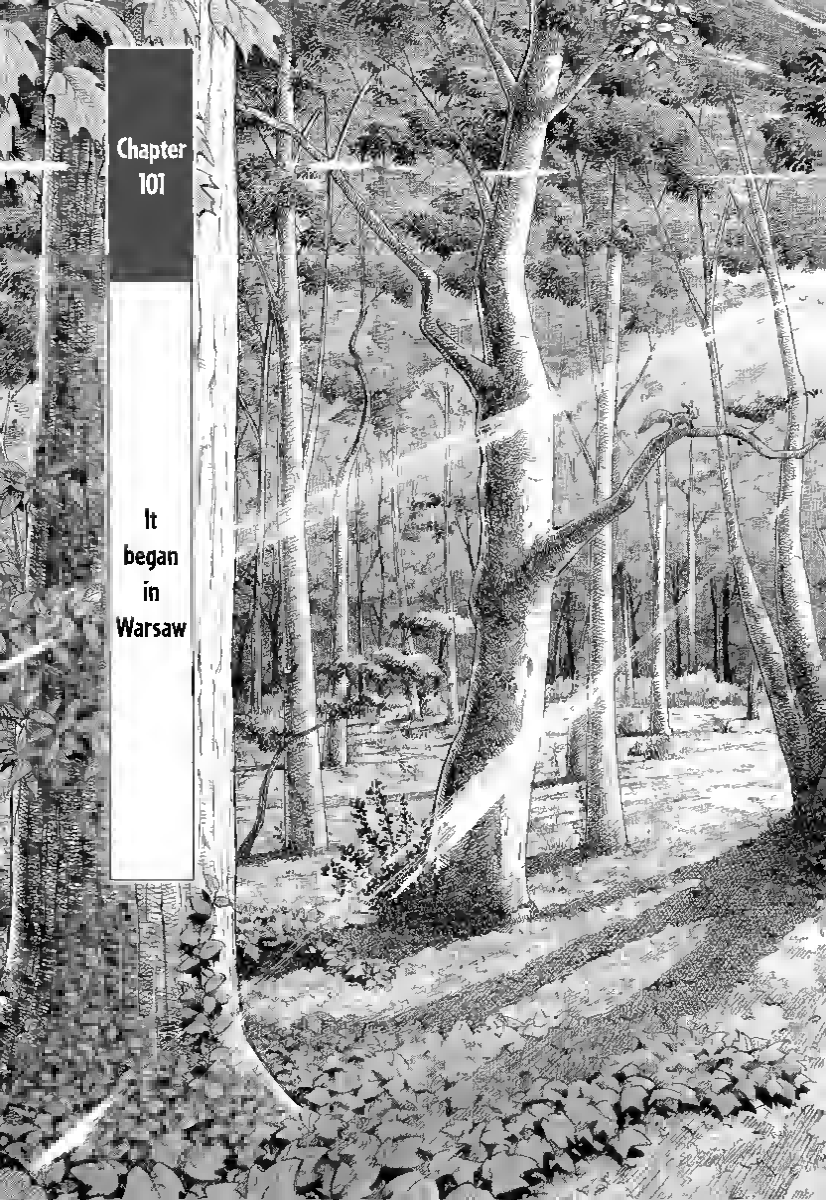
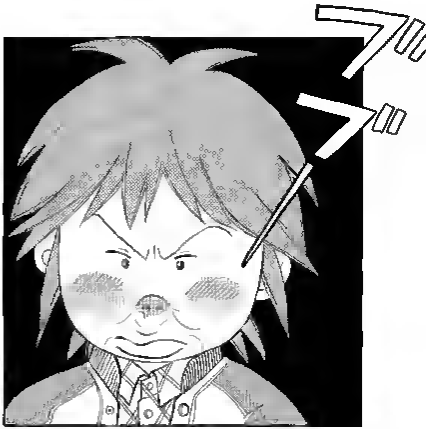

Sae-chan, how are you?
I'm good...
As always, I'll be going to "Chopin's Forest" in the morning.

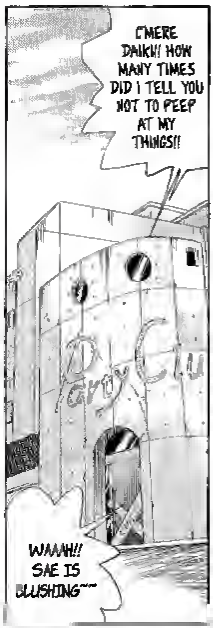
It's been 3 weeks since I came to Warsaw...


If this forest weren't here for me,
I would have probably missed Japan
and really cried.


Chapter
101
It
began
in
Warsaw

Oh, Sae-chan he misses you and cries.
DAMN.

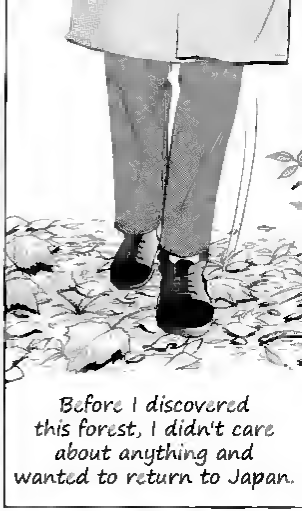



C'MERE DAIKI! HOW MANY TIMES DID I TELL YOU NOT TO PEEP AT MY THINGS!!
WAAAH!! SAE IS BLUSHING~~

What? No! that's not what he wrote...!
BWA HAHA HAHA
YOU MISS HIM TOO YOU MISS HIM. YOU MISS HIM.

10 days left until Chopin Competition. Before that, there will be preliminary trials.
To hang in there until his return! But still..
Ajino asked me to..

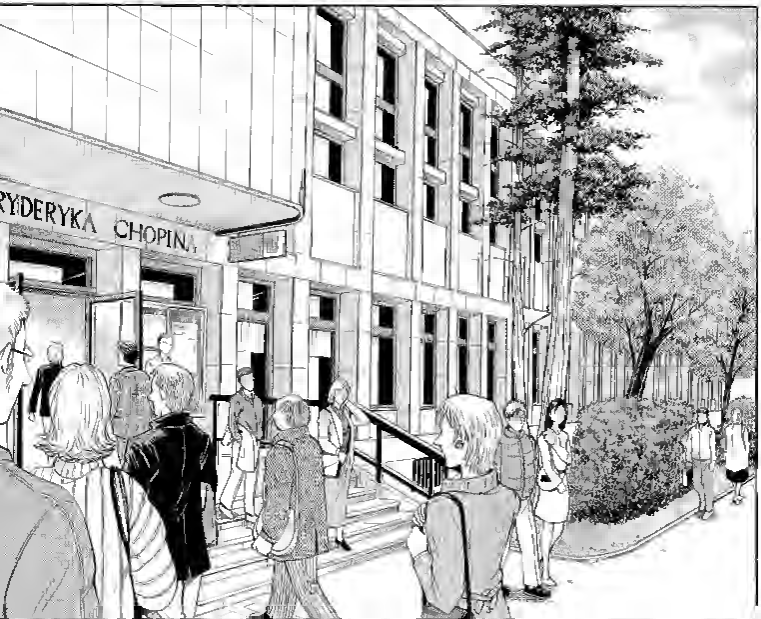
Sae-chan,
every time,
it's the forests
that rescue me.


Before I discovered
this forest, I didn't care
about anything and
wanted to return to Japan.

I wish I could show you
this forest. I'm sure
you will like it too.

Preliminary
trials will begin this
afternoon, and I'm planning
to go watch them! Even
though my turn will only
come on the last day...

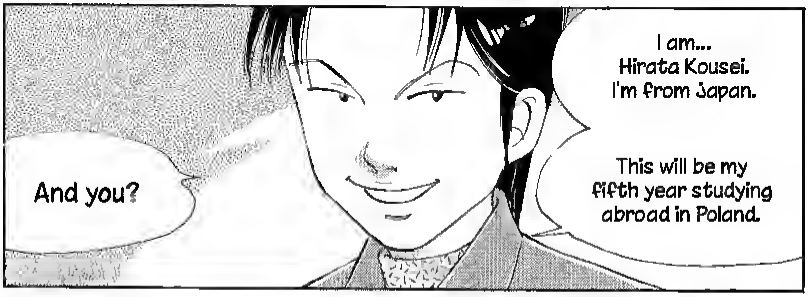
Amamiya will
perform today!!


RYDERYKA CHOPINA

Preliminary trials..
If you don't pass,
you can't participate in
the Chopin competition.

That's why,
the challenge has
already started.
パチ
パチ
パチ
パチ
パチ
This wasn't
good at all!

Unfortunately she got excited and the notes came out quaveringly.
She's not good enough to participate in this contest.

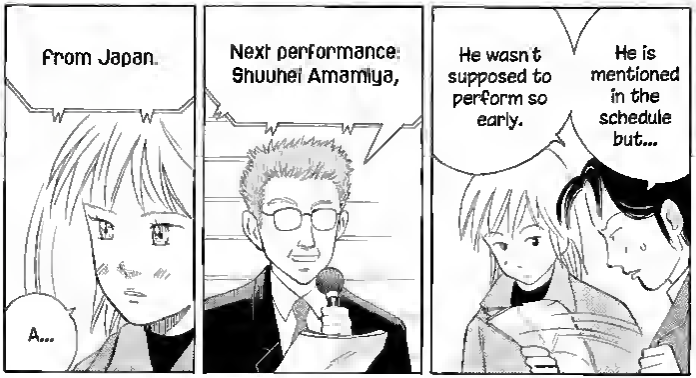

I am... Hirata Kousei. I'm from Japan.
This will be my fifth year studying abroad in Poland.
And you?

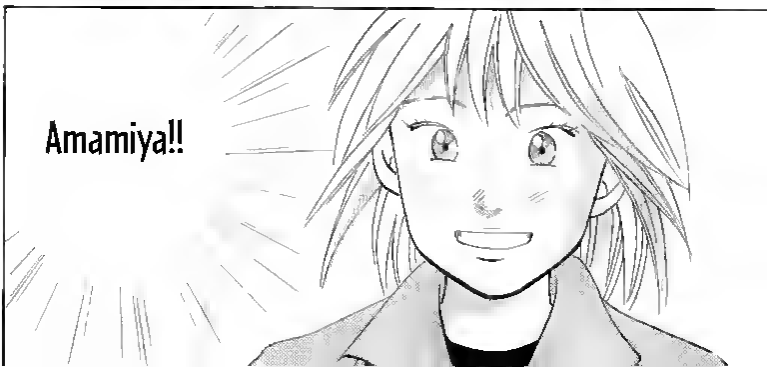
I had a feeling that you were Japanese... I should've talked in Japanese.
Oh man, you are Japanese eh...
Ichinose Kai! I'm from Japan too.

ザワ
ザワ
ザワ
……
ザワ
Who knows, I'll go take a look!
What's going on?
He looks sick.
Ah...
ザワ
ザワ

Oh! I'm glad he's not disqualified.
He said he lacked stamina and wanted to change the line-up.
It's expected, since this is Poland!
Really ?
That guy already switched positions on the first day!... Man, they are lenient towards Polish...
The pressure is expected, but he is a total wimp.
ドゃドゃ
Lots of people gushed in all of a sudden! On top of that, for a Japanese.
What's it this time?

He must be a Japanese idol.
Japanese TV channels.


From Japan.
A...
Next performance: Shuuhei Amamiya,
He wasn't supposed to perform so early.
He is mentioned in the schedule but...

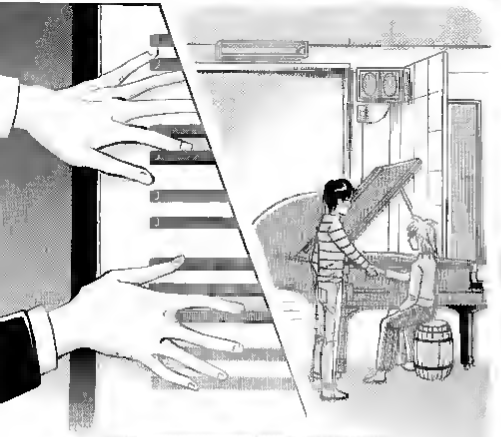

Amamiya!!

パチ
パチ
パチ
パチ
パチ
パチ
パチ
Ahahaa.
That's so typical of Amamiya Jr... Even though this is just the preliminary trials, he dragged the media in flocks...
...Man, this pisses me off.
パチ
パチ
パチ
パチ
パチ
パチ
パチ
パチ

パチパチパチパチ Clap
パチパチパチパチ Clap
Amamiya!!
パチパチパチパチ Clap
パチパチパチパチ Clap

Looks cool.
I'm seeing him after a long time. Amamiya...
Really amazing.
Amamiya is...

That technique shows the difference between him and all the pianists that played so far

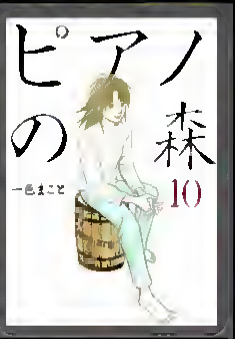

Kai-kun, I will let you listen to my piano next time we meet.

It's been a year and two months since that summer day.

Rather, I want you to listen, no matter what.
CHAPTER 10 / END

PIANO NO MORI

by Isshiki Makoto



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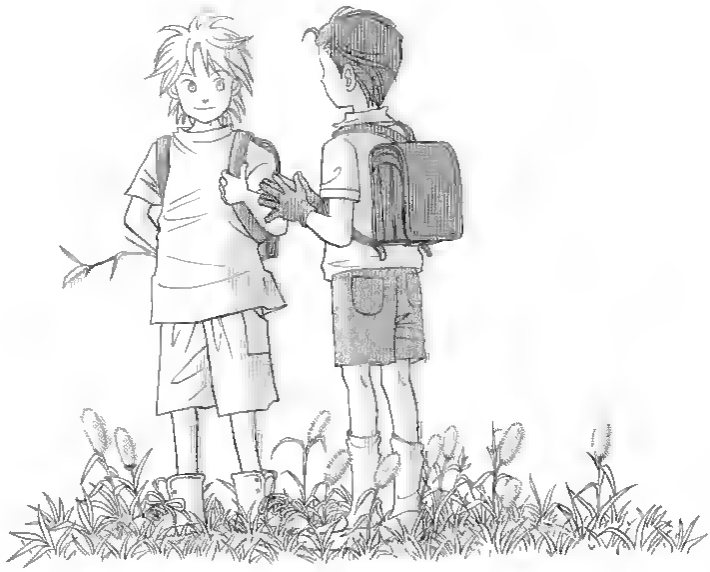


Chapter 102 Amamiya Fever

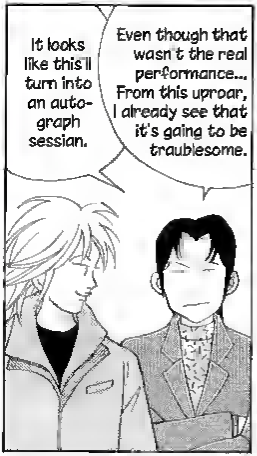
パチパチ
パチパチ
パチパチ

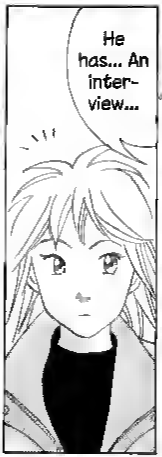
Amazing...
Amamiya.

You are already on cloud nine.
フラッ
What's this all about, as if it's the climax...
Hey, c'mon, it's still the preliminaries!
Ah...
ドヤドヤ
パチ
Eh?
But I'm shocked. As soon as Amamiya moves, both mass media and fans follow in flocks.

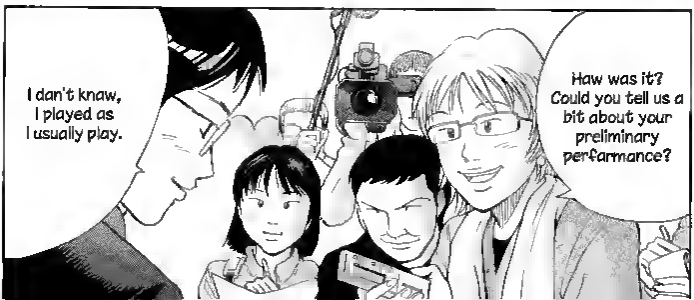
Are you Amamiya's fan too?!
What's up with you!?
Hey!
He's my friend!
Yeah!
Friend?
F...

42

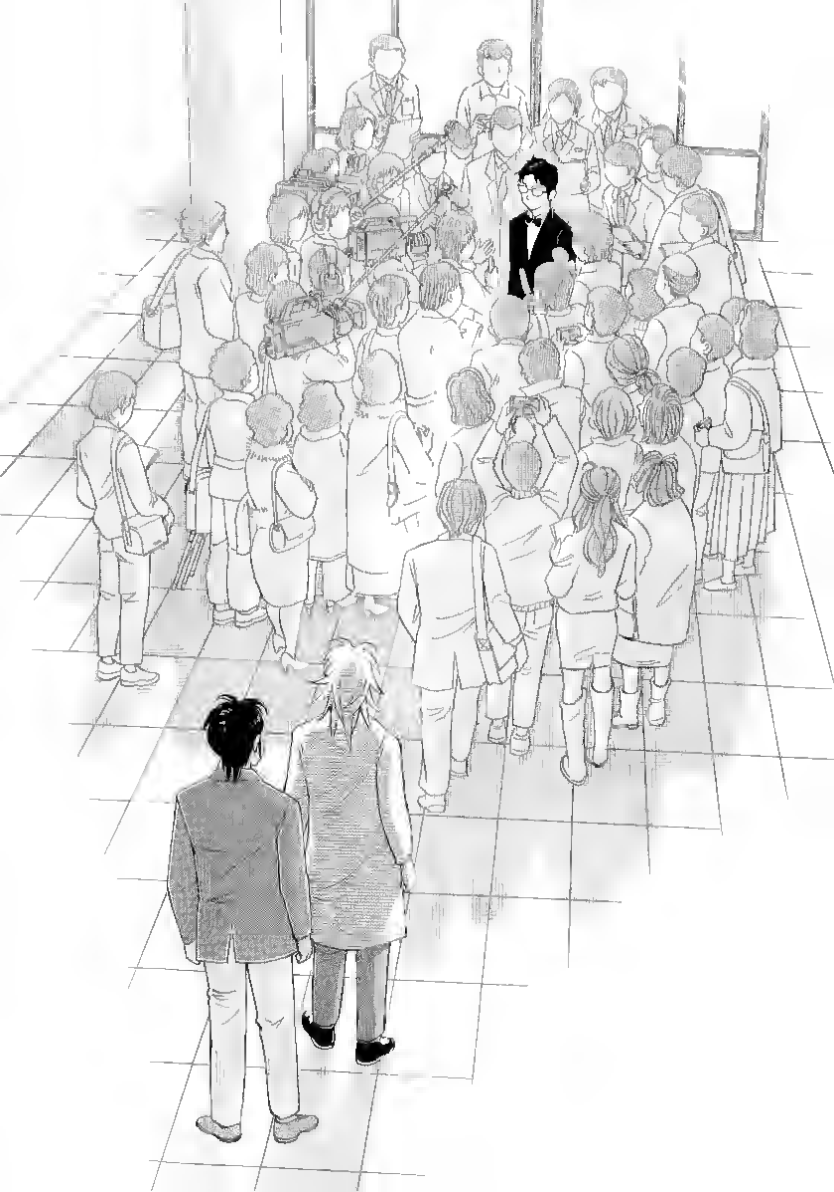

It looks like this'll turn into an auto-graph sessian.
Even though that wasn't the real performance... From this uproar, I already see that it's going to be troublesome.


He has... An inter-view...

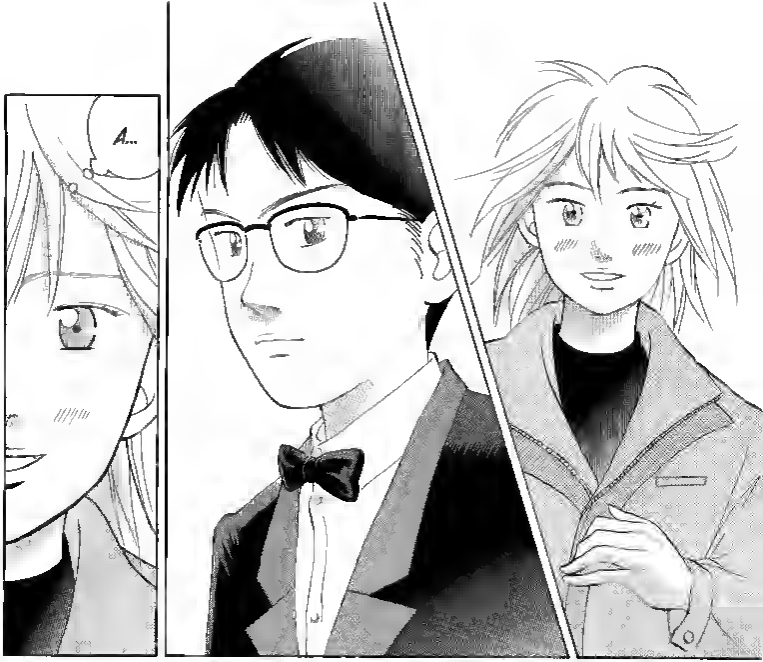
ガヤ ガヤ


I don't know, I played as I usually play.
How was it? Could you tell us a bit about your preliminary performance?

As a participant, you are at the youngest permissible age. So, how confident are you?
This time, I intended to test my ability, so...
I'll advance as far as I can!
A... Amamiya.



Amamiya.


A...

E-Excuse me!
I'm from the "Monthly Classic Music Magazine".
If possible, could you please spare some time to hold the interview we have agreed on, now?

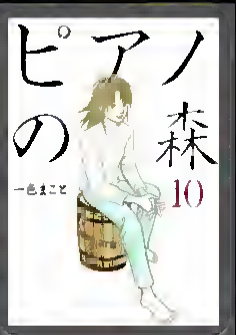
どぅろ
どぅろ
However, I can't spare much time...
Sure.

.....

CHAPTER 102 / END

PIANO NO MORI

by Isshiki Makoto



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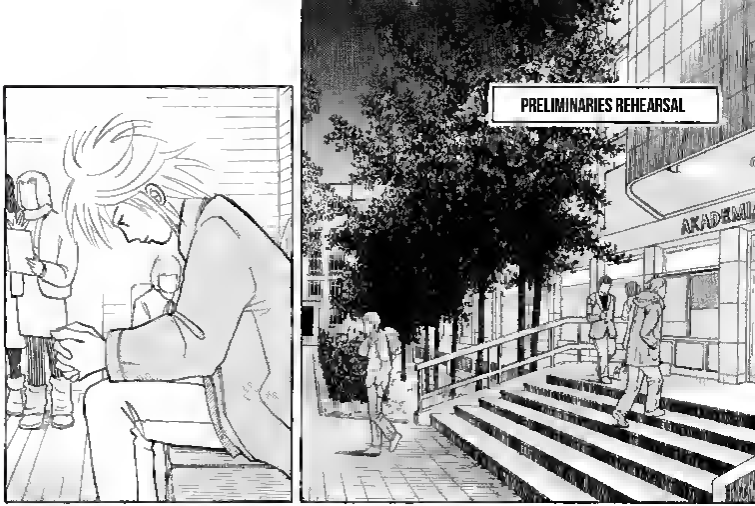
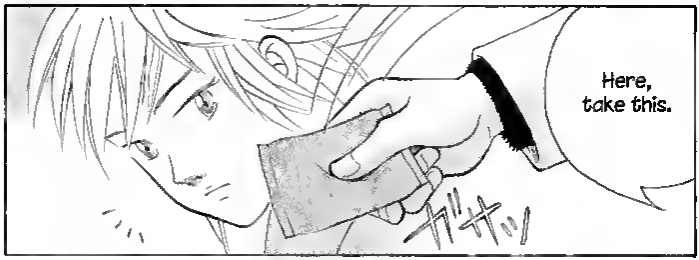
Chapter 103

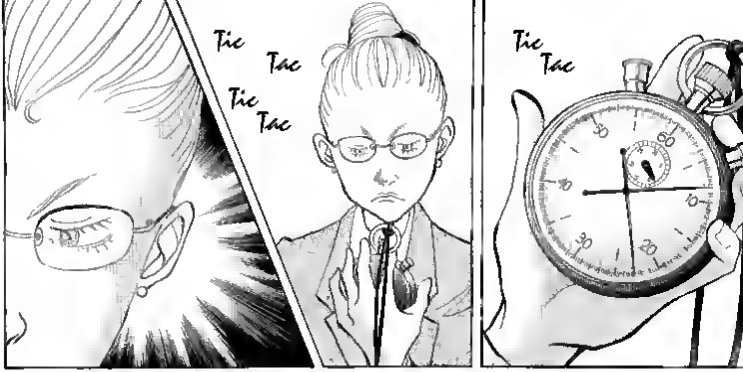
Pull yourself together!

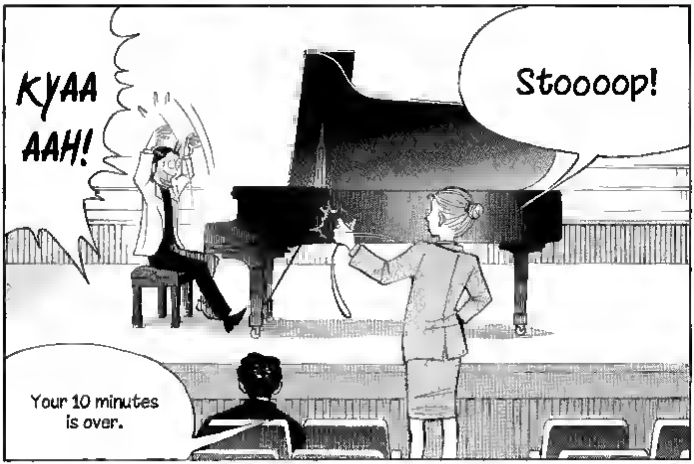

PRELIMINARIES REHEARSAL


Here, take this.

But wasn't your turn before mine?
A heated pad?
You need to warm up your hands before-hand...
They don't allow anyone to use the piano more than 10 minutes!

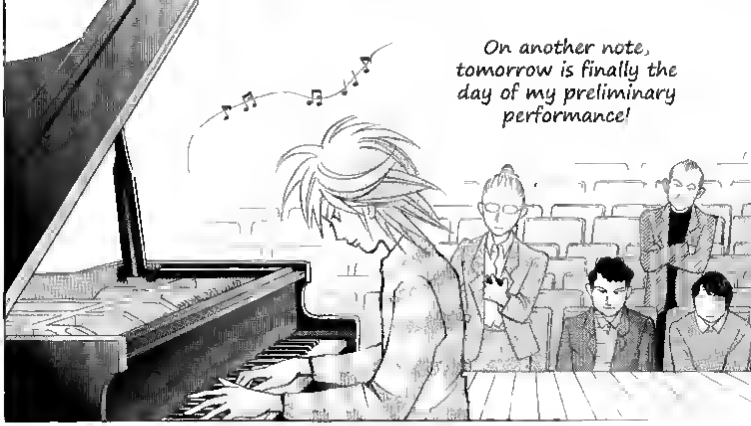
Since my name, "Hirata" begins with an "H" and yours, "Ichinose" begin with an "I", my turn will come...
This time, the turns are arranged according to the first letter in your name, beginning from O.
You can call me "kousei".
No need to call me "you"
ほか ほか
You see... That's why I'm giving it back.
Before yours!
it's okay as long as we have 10 minutes. It'll be the same tomorrow, right?
But still, isn't 10 minutes too short?
My principle is, never rely on any items.
No, no!
Haa...

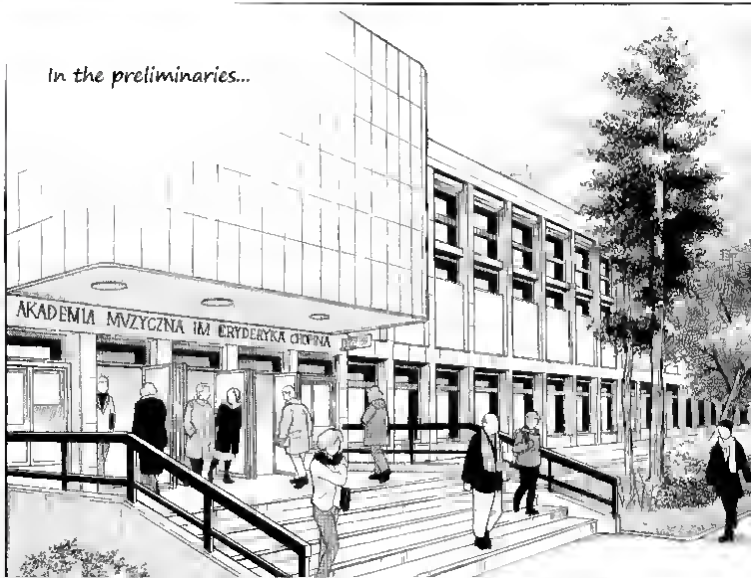

Tic
Tac
Tic
Tac
Tic
Tac

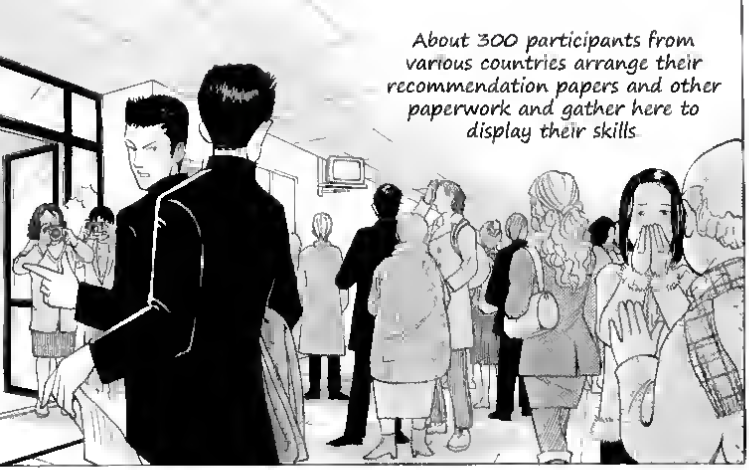

KyAA
AAH!
Stoooop!
Your 10 minutes is over.

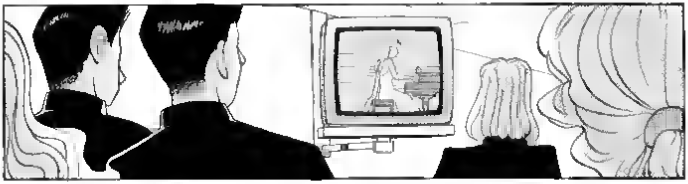
My hands went numb and I... Couldn't play enough!!!
Eeeh?! 10 minutes already pass?!

I heard every-thing-
MY HANDS WERE SOMEWHAT NUMB AND I COULDN'T PLAY ENOUGH!!!
If you don't warm up your hands, you're in serious trouble!
Kai!! It's strictly 10 minutes!! They don't let anyone play any longer than that!!
Yes ma'am!
Next! Kai Ichinose
He's 17 years old, like me. Kousei boasts about how he will win the "Youngest participant award" rather winning the 1st prize, which is what he calls 'a wise move' (?)
Sae-chan, I met a strange guy here. His name is Kousei...
Kai! Don't waste the 10 minutes!


On another note, tomorrow is finally the day of my preliminary performance!

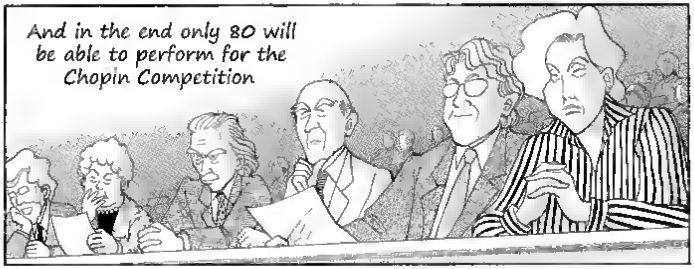

In the preliminaries...
AKADEMIA MUZYCZNA IM FRYDERYKA CHOPINA

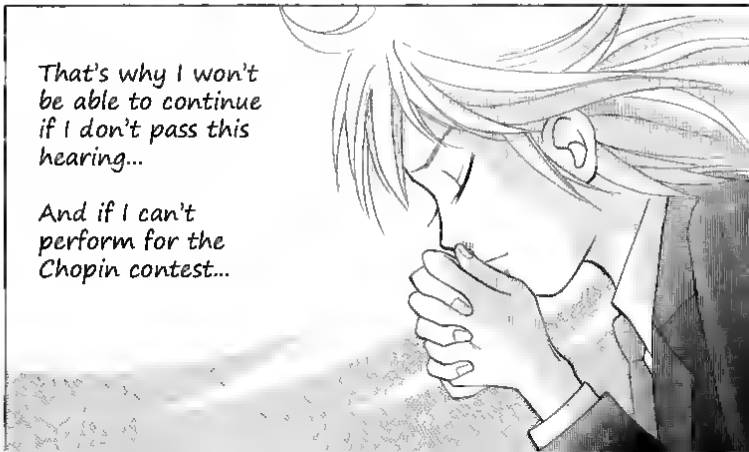

About 300 participants from various countries arrange their recommendation papers and other paperwork and gather here to display their skills



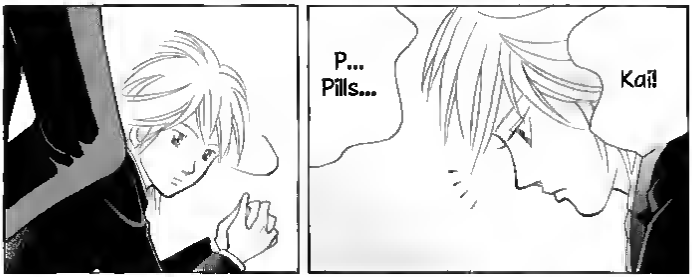
The participants must play their songs within 10 minutes and this whole procedure lasts a week

Their performances are evaluated by the judges.


And in the end only 80 will be able to perform for the Chopin Competition


That's why I won't be able to continue if I don't pass this hearing...
And if I can't perform for the Chopin contest...

I won't be able to fulfill my promise to Serrault and Ajino, who wrote my letters of recommendation!


P... Pills...
Kai!

I don't have any pills, but...
Eh?
Do you have any pills for stomach-ache or something like that?
M... My stomach hurts so bad...

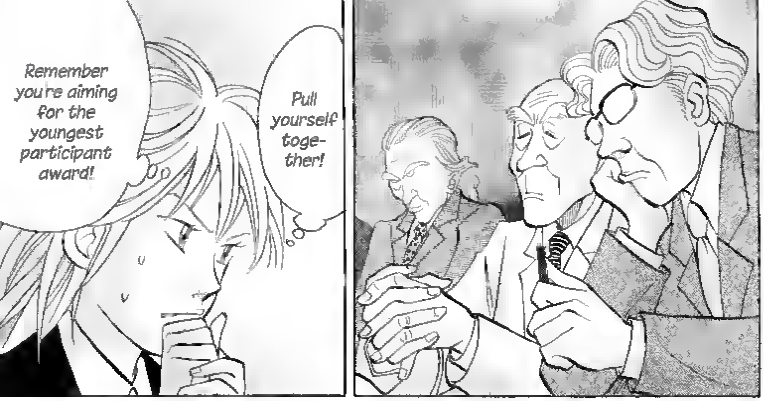
I only ate some red beans*. My granny is a little superstitious, so she made me eat them...
Not really...
W... Will you be okay? You are up next!
If you didn't eat enough to cause you a sour sto-mach...
Read beans shouldn't be a problem,
Did you eat anything that would upset your stomach?
Kousei Hirata
Are the songs and their order okay?
I didn't eat that much, but I'm having sour stomach...
I feel like shit ...
T... That's it! Certoiniy ...
Eh? Come an it's only a stomach-ache!
I want to throw up.

T/N: EATING RED RICE (BEANS AND MOCHI) IS A CUSTOM FOR AUSPICIOUS OCCASIONS

OKAY?
OKAY.
THE NEXT CONTESTANT IS, KOUSEI HIRATA..
Too late, they announced me. .
Why don't you change your turn with someone else? You still have time for that...
If you can do that, you'll be in the Chopin competition that you desire so much!!
Well, it's just 10 minutes! Try to concentrate for 10 minutes and play your best.
No I'm not, but I can't be disqualified for not performing either!
Are you really okay?

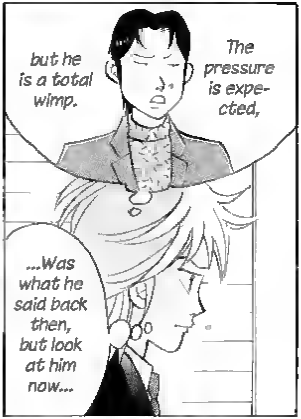
Clap
Clap
Bow
wobble
wobble
Clap
Clap

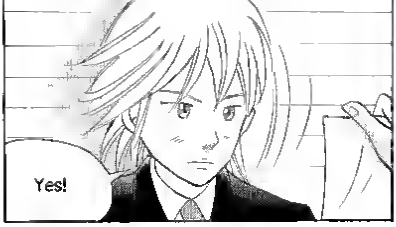
His fingers are not where they suppose to be!
Kousei...


Remember you're aiming for the youngest participant award!
Pull yourself toge-ther!

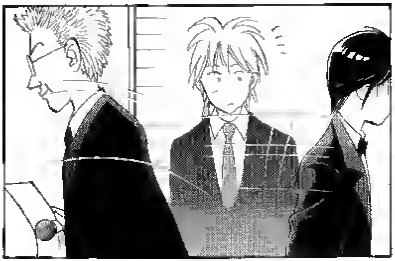
However, if he doesn't pull himself together...

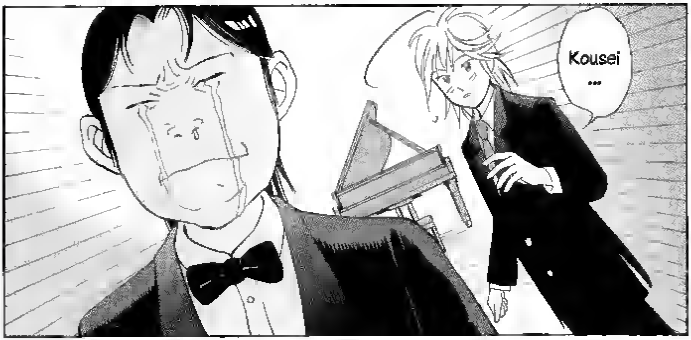
Kai Ichinose

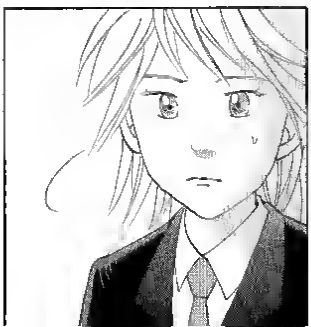

The pressure is expe-cted,
but he is a total wimp.
...Was what he said back then, but look at him now...


Yes!

Are you content with the songs and their order?




Kousei ...

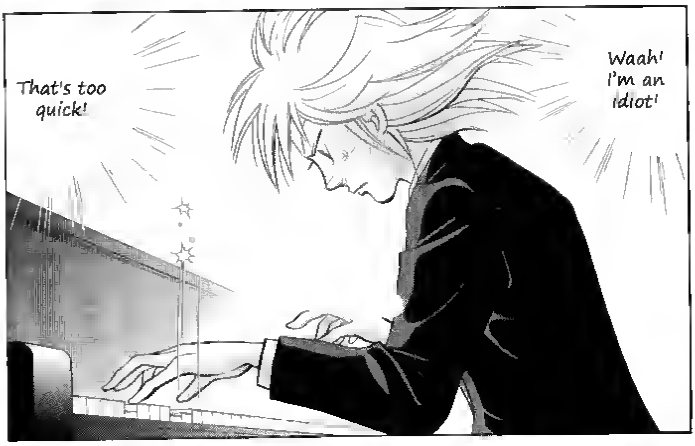


NEXT CONTESTANT IS KAI ICHINOSE. HE WILL BE PERFORMING...

Shit! The stage fright got me too...
Calm down!
Calm down!
I wouldn't like to repeat what happened with Kousei's performance
Don't be impatient!

Don't be impatient and find the correct tempo.

A... Anyway, first I need to calm down!


That's too quick!
Waah! I'm an idiot!

He's not playing at the correct tempo...
Kai...?

.....

Kai...!

Pull yourself together!

PIANO NO MORI

by Isshiki Makoto

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Piano No Mori Ch 104

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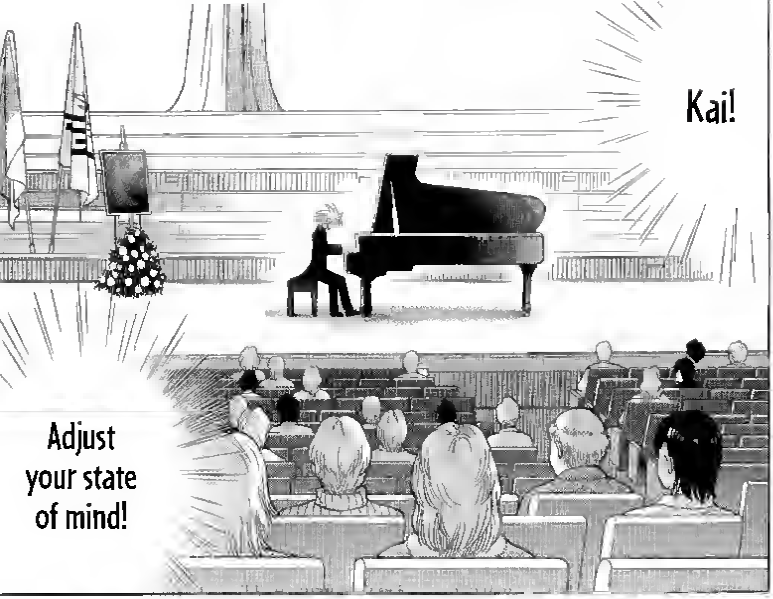
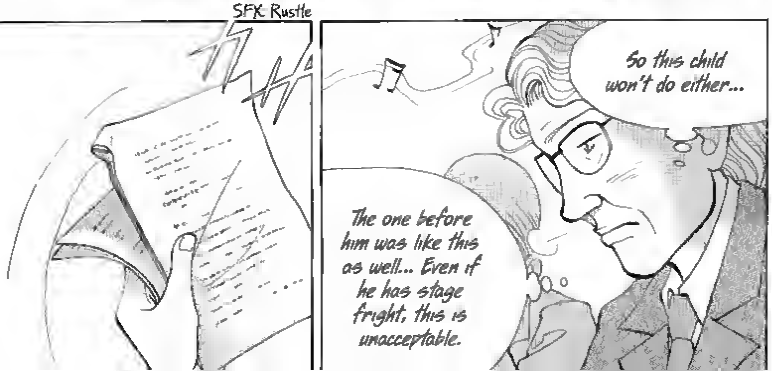
Chapter
104
Cough,
Cough

Calm down!
Calm...
I have to calm down!
This difficult piece, with such a quick tempo isn't helping his to relax
It's no good. He is in utter panic.

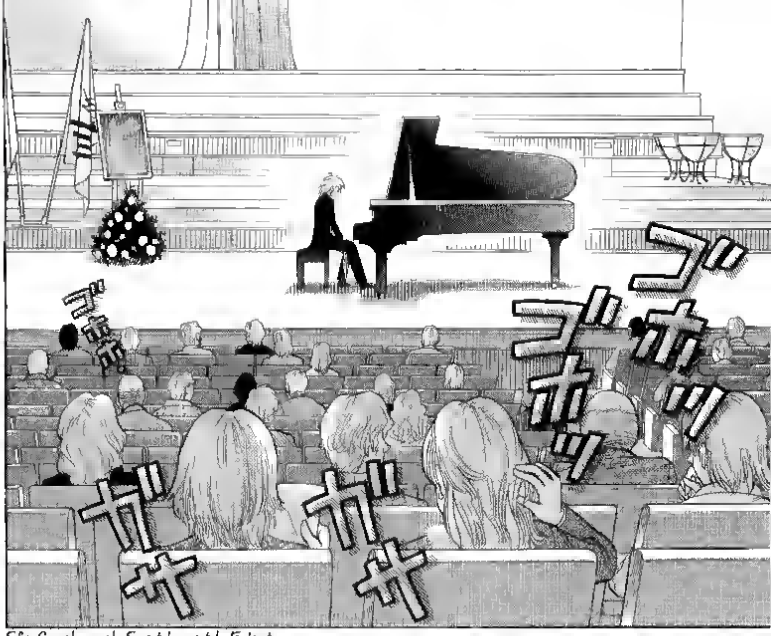

Kai!
Adjust your state of mind!

....


SFX: Rustle
So this child won't do either...
The one before him was like this as well... Even if he has stage fright, this is unacceptable.

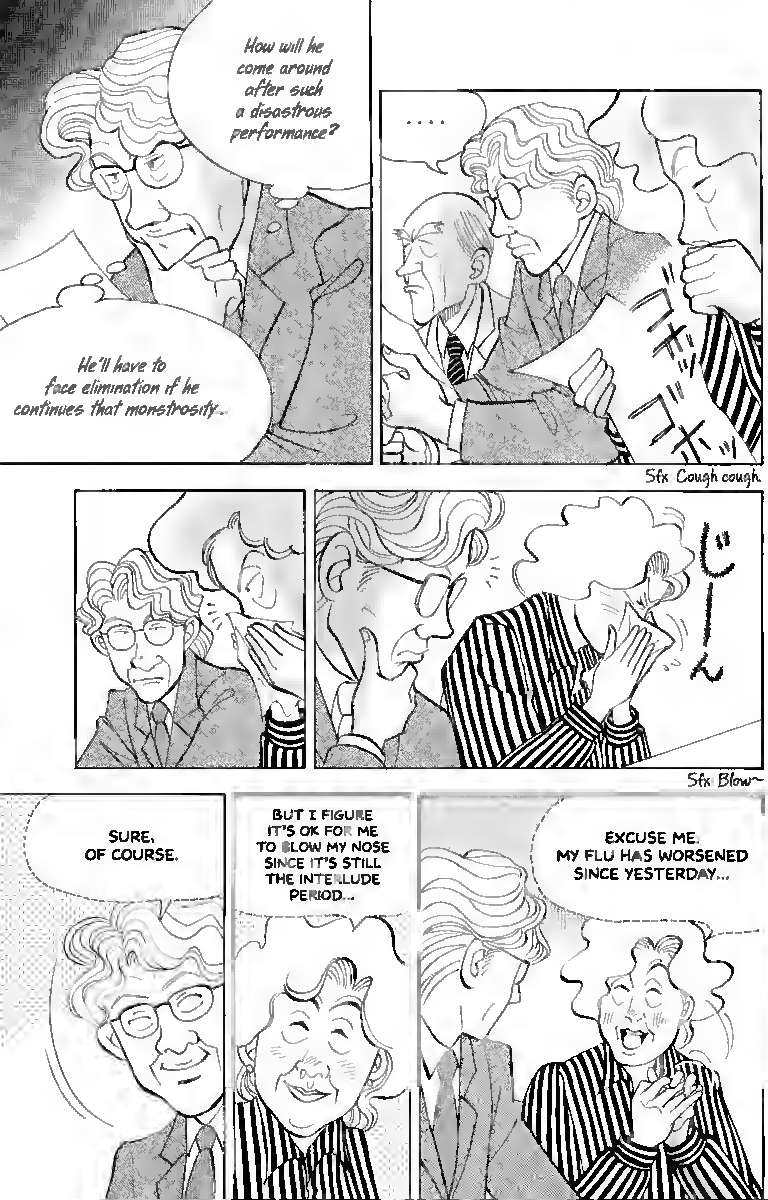
I just don't get it. Why did Serrault recommend this boy...?
♫ ♪
.....
Yeah. Give it up! Give it up!
He should give up this part.
Though he has two whole minutes to perform...
This Etude. in C Major..

Come on!!
SFX. Cling Cling Cling
Kai...
The second song is crucial. It could make or break your performance.
SFX. Boom
Drat. Those were two torturously long minutes.
It's finally over..
SFX. Phew



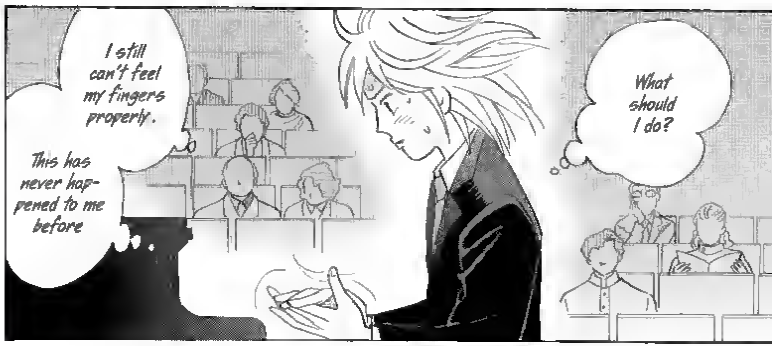
SFX: Cough cough. Scratch scratch. Fidget.

But I'm still so nervous!
My fingers are completely numb
That is the most important thing!
I must adapt.
Messing up on such an important occasion..
What the hell am I doing.


How will he come around after such a disastrous performance?
He'll have to face elimination if he continues that monstrosity..
....
ゴボゴボ
Sfx Cough cough
じーん
Sfx Blow~
SURE, OF COURSE.
BUT I FIGURE IT'S OK FOR ME TO BLOW MY NOSE SINCE IT'S STILL THE INTERLUDE PERIOD...
EXCUSE ME. MY FLU HAS WORSENED SINCE YESTERDAY...

Sure it's no problem, but it'd still be better if you had cured your flu before coming

THANK YOU.
IT'S NOTHING.


I still can't feel my fingers properly.
This has never happened to me before
What should I do?

Am I really so prone to stage fright?
Can it be...?

Be it the Edge of the Forest... or Chopin's forest...
Think about the forest.
Oh right. The forest...

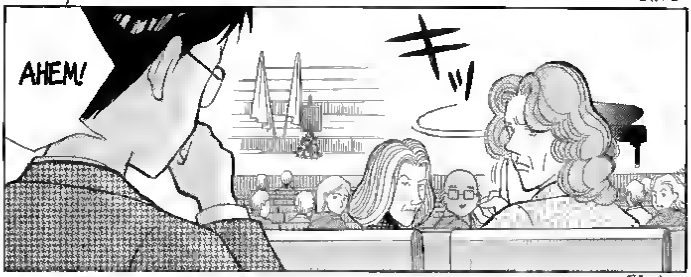
I don't think there are penalties for that... But who knows.
That is one long interlude.
Is it ok to stop for so long? Will he be penalized for it?
Kai! Don't rush yourself into playing the second piece! Take your time to prepare yourself!
It doesn't matter..

And clear the preliminary round!
Give everything you have in the next song.
Being penalized is nothing.
Kai, regain your composure!
If the long pause can erase the bad impression created by your previous song!
Then recompose yourself quickly!!
If you don't want it to be all over...
SFX mumble 7x
AFTER THAT KIND OF PERFORMANCE..
BUT WE MUST ASSESS THE COMPLETE PERFORMANCE..
....
ISN'T THE BOY'S REST A BIT TOO LONG?
INDEED..

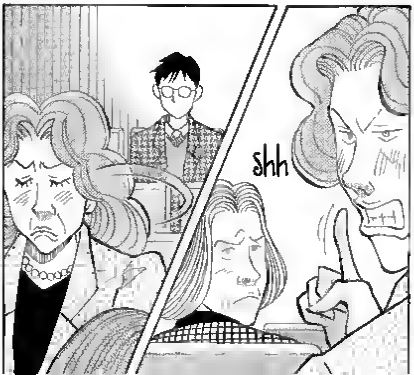
Sfx. mumble mumble
I can't picture the forest.
It's not working
No...
I can't even picture a blade of grass.
COUGH

Sfx: Cough

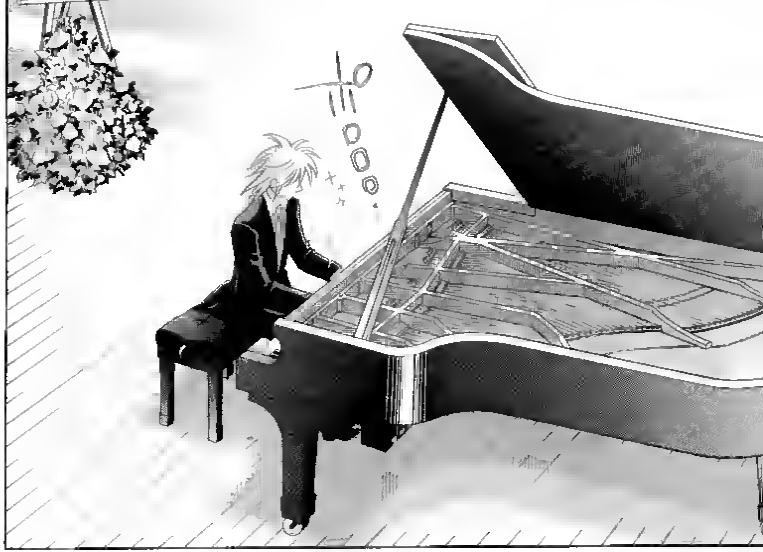
Sfx: Cough Cough

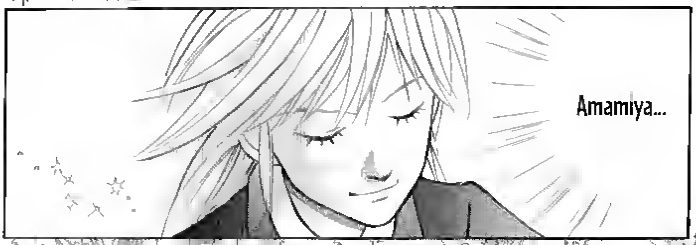


Sfx: turns



Amamiya...
Ah...
Has come.
Amamiya...
Sfx place

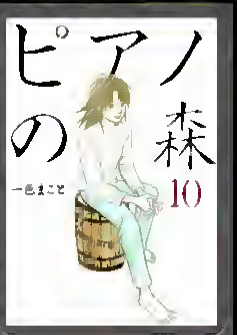

Sfx Tinkle tinkle


Amamiya...

Ah...
Kai...

PIANO NO MORI

by Isshiki Makoto



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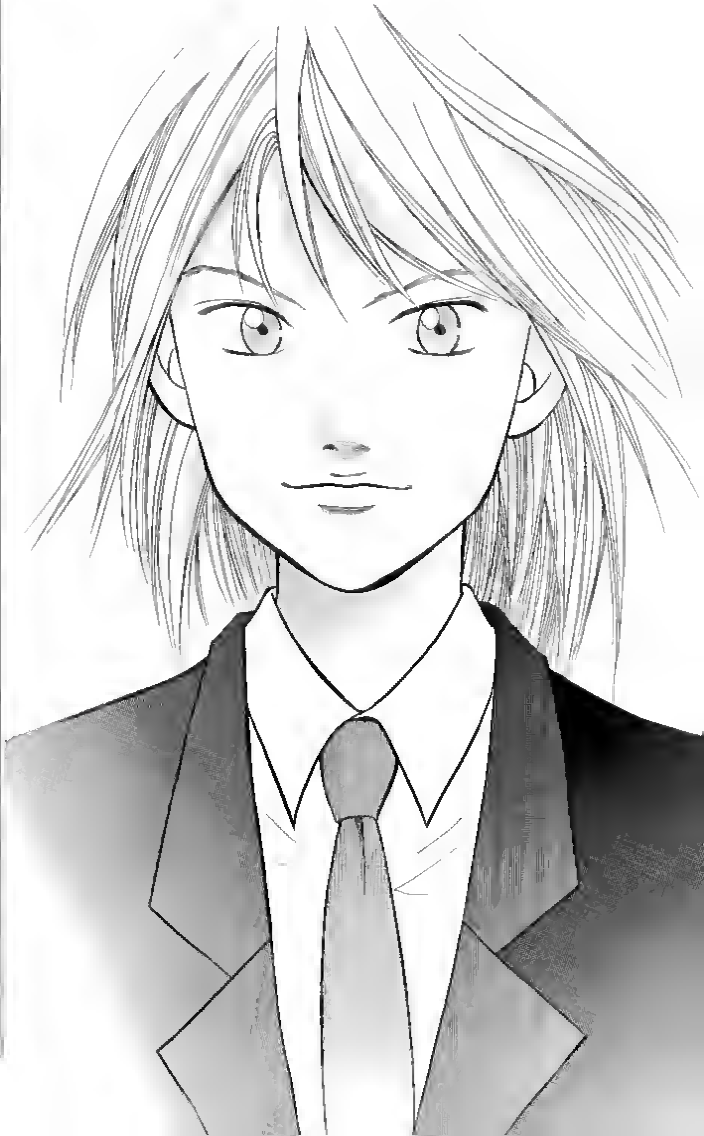
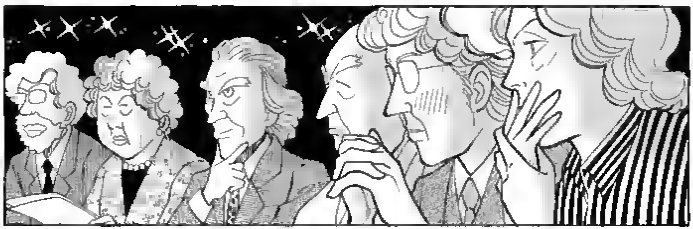
Chapter 105

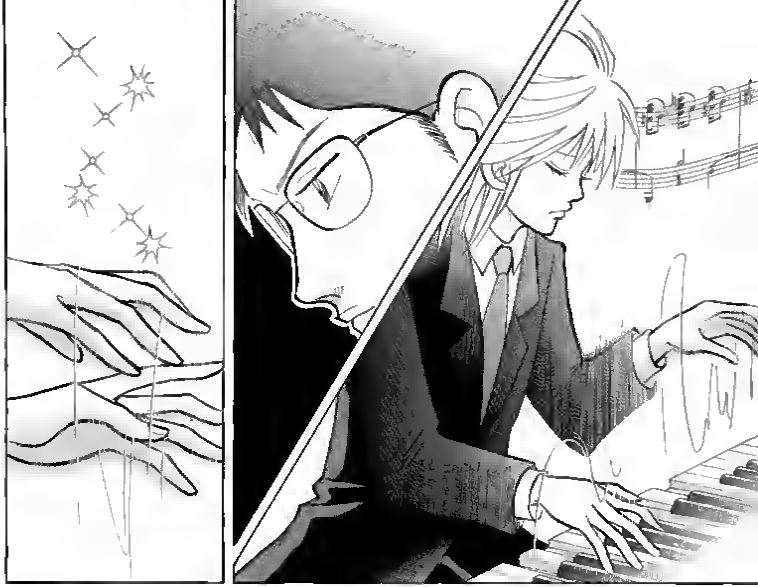
What They Say About Amamiya

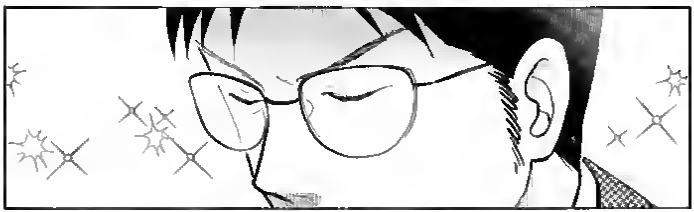




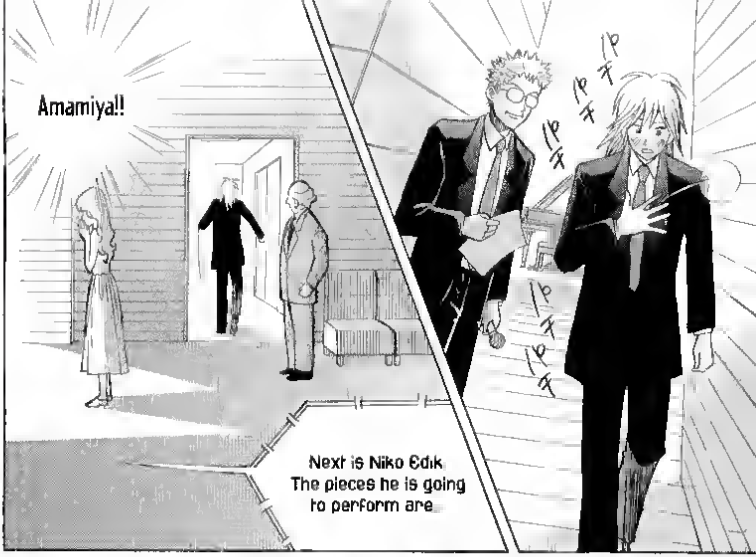
A...

Maybe Kai is a black horse
Amazing.
Squeeze





Sfx: clap clap clap



Sfx clap clap clap

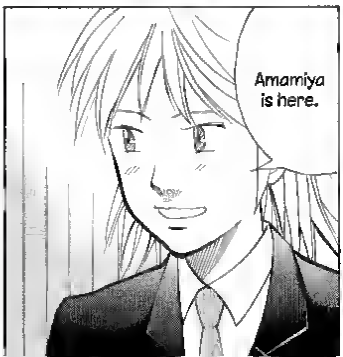
Ahaha... Come to think of it, I did feel a wave of energy surging in!
Exactly! So treat me to a hamburger to show your gratitude!
I was transferring energy to you psychically all along, urging you to regain your composure.
Will I really...
Definitely!
Hmm? That guy...
Eh-? Hamburger...

What a windbag of a Dad!
Has already been repositioned to perform last. There's no way out...
That guy...
Still putting so much pressure on his son when he's already that nervous.
What?
Kousei...
That's the case for me too.

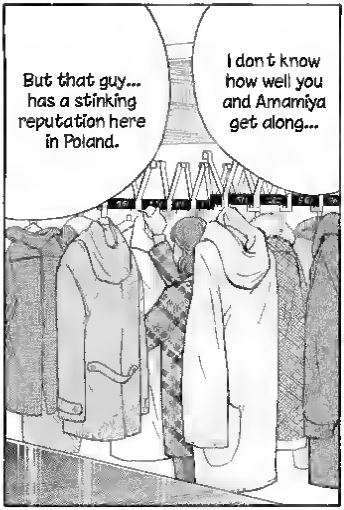
Kousei...
It's my fault that I couldn't pull myself together like you.
So my Chopin Competition is over.
Don't try to make me feel better.
You watched my performance, didn't you?
Sure.
I'll treat you to a hamburger...
. . .
Clap
Clap
Clap
Hang on!

Sfx: turn turn

Sfx: Mumble mumble. Cough cough.

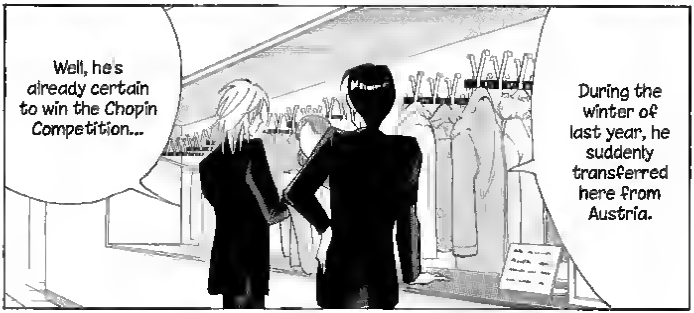


How could he be?
No, he's not.
Besides, that guy...
Only cares about himself!
There aren't any big hits on the final day of the preliminary round. He wouldn't have come.

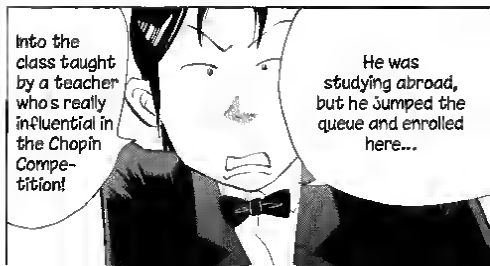

But that guy... has a stinking reputation here in Poland.
I don't know how well you and Amamiya get along...

You don't know Amamiya.
That's not true!

So what?


Well, he's already certain to win the Chopin Competition...
During the winter of last year, he suddenly transferred here from Austria.

....


Into the class taught by a teacher who's really influential in the Chopin Competition!
He was studying abroad, but he jumped the queue and enrolled here...

I'm not badmouthing him. It's a matter of fact.
Stop it, Kousei.
It's the sort of class that some people can't get in even after spending years on the waiting list!
He will use money and connections to get whatever he wants!
Amamiya only thinks about himself.
That's the gossip about him...

Hey...

Crap. Did he hear that?
Amamiya!
Ama...
Don't feel offended I was just speaking the truth.
Let's save the hamburger another time!
Kai, I'll see you!

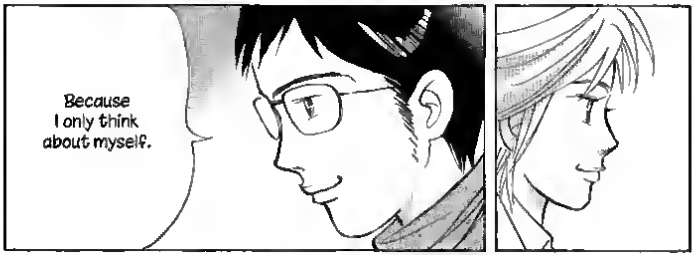
Seeing Kai like that... you gave me such a fright there.
Haha... That was really close.

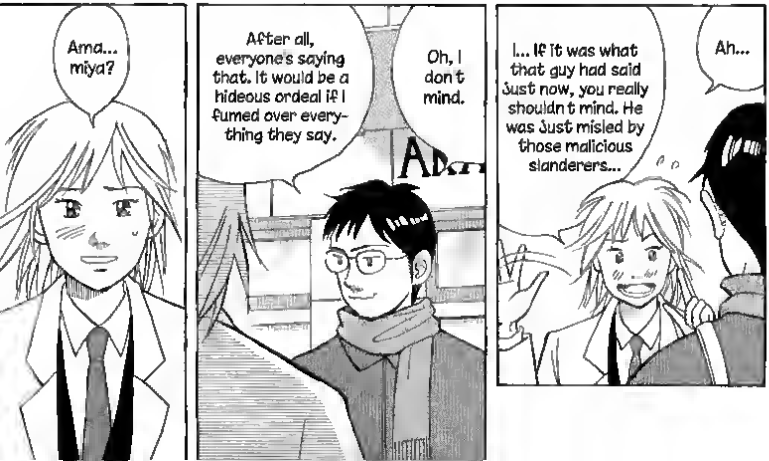
So they really were Amamiya's.
Those coughs and "sorry" were perfect...

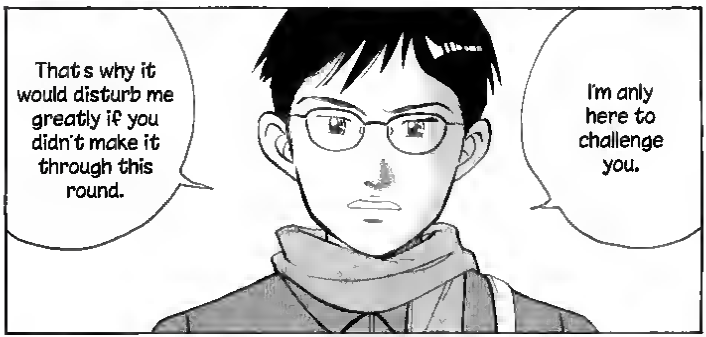
It didn't matter which song it was. My fingers just went out of control and started playing on their own.
Yeah. And that song too.
My head and my fingers were all in tangles and I was sweating all over.
Yeah! That was my first case of stage fright ever!

I came to my senses when I knew Amamiya was there.
But Amamiya came to my rescue!

But I didn't do it to help you.
I'm glad to be of help.
It felt like my frozen brain restorted.


Because I only think about myself.

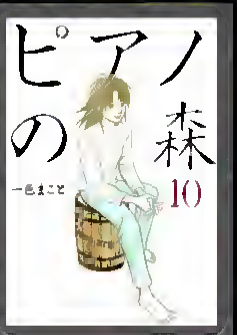

Ama... miya?
After all, everyone's saying that. It would be a hideous ordeal if I fumed over everything they say.
Oh, I don't mind.
I... If it was what that guy had said just now, you really shouldn't mind. He was just misled by those malicious slanderers...
Ah...



Chapter 105 – End

PIANO NO MORI

by Isshiki Makoto



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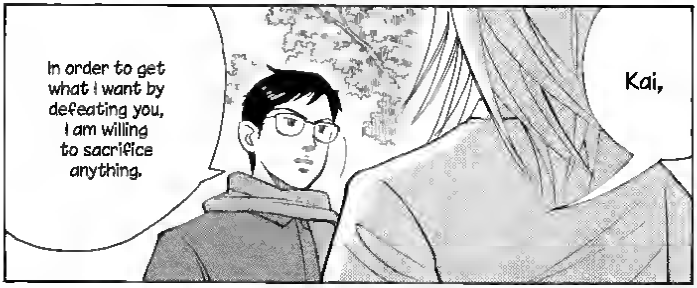
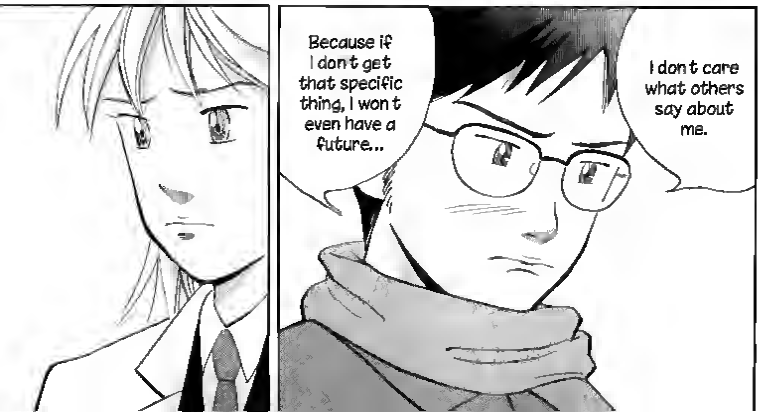
Chapter 106

Shake Hands

I will not allow you to disappear before reaching the stage of our final showdown.
I AM ONLY HERE TO DEFEAT YOU.
That's why I wasn't trying to help you back there.
I was just really angry...

Ama-miya...
I merely coughed to stop myself from yelling out these words.
I'm right here!
Get serious!


In order to get what I want by defeating you, I am willing to sacrifice anything.
Kai,


Because if I don't get that specific thing, I won't even have a future...
I don't care what others say about me.

Self-confidence...
Amamiya...
What exactly do you want to get by defeating me?
Amamiya will get self-confidence by defeating me!?
Ahaha... You're joking, right!?
I was eliminated in the first round of the Japan National Students' Piano Contest, and Amamiya got first in the entire country!
If that's the case, wasn't the winner already decided back when we were kids?

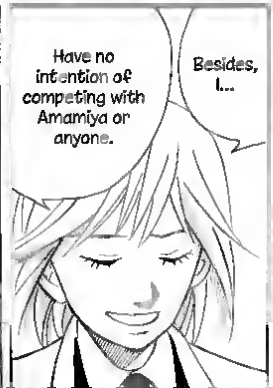
Yes... It's the same.
I'm only making use of the stage of this Chopin Competition.
Then this competition...
Kai! Don't make me say it another time! It's not about what other people think It's about what I think.
This is still the world-renowned Chopin Competition, after all...
Of course, I still look forward to receiving some positive acclaim.
The piano is not a tool for determining the winner... You're your only rival.
Amamiya, you're wrong.

I've decided not to run away from your piano.
This is in a deeper level.
I don't need you to tell me something that obvious. I've always been trying to exceed myself.
If I can't run away, then I'll have to surpass you!

Give it everything you've got...
Kai, do your best!

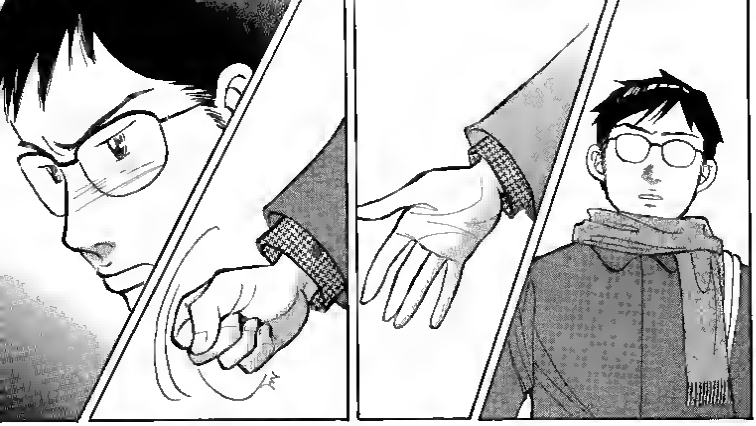
Haha...
I haven't matured much, huh?

Something like this has happened before.
...Otherwise we'd stop being friends?

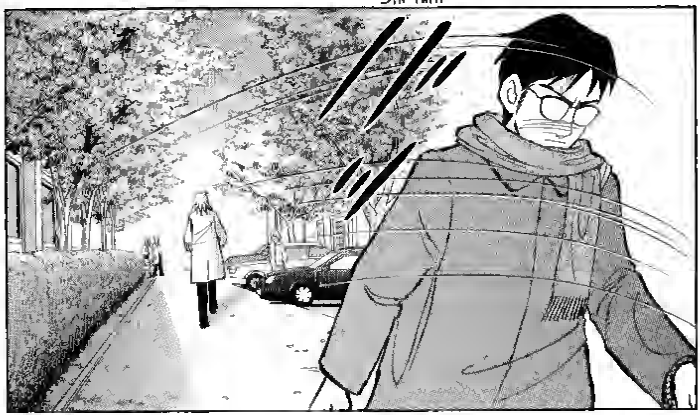

Have no intention of competing with Amamiya or anyone.
Besides, I...

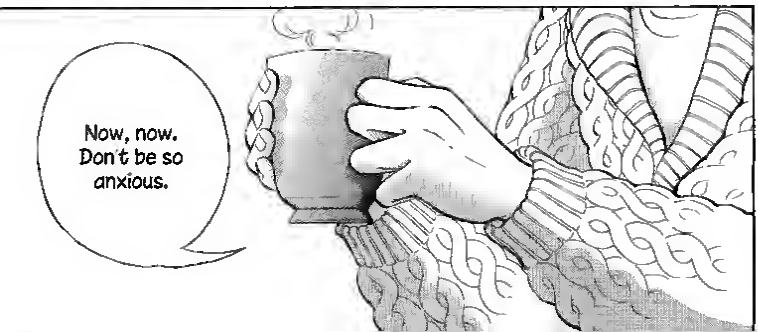
It's just that it goes without saying. I'll try my best no matter what.
That's not it...

I'm not even sure whether I'll make it through the preliminary round!
Look! I panicked because of stage fright earlier...
Because I'm still competing with the enemy within!
Well, see you, Amamiya!



Sfx turn



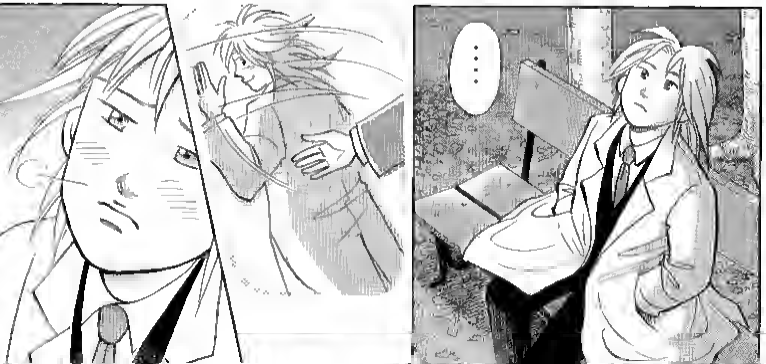


I don't understand it myself.
Why am I so uneasy every time I talk to Kai?
Kai only feels perplexed even when I treat him as my enemy.
I feel so angry about that!
Haha. There's nothing to be angry about. You're lucky to be able to challenge your rival directly.
Challenges that can't be brought to fruition are truly unfortunate.

I can listen calmly to all sorts of piano...
But... Why?
You're right...
Ichinose's piano is special?
Even though I certainly look up to Dad's piano and even Ajino-sensei's piano, I don't feel that way when listening to them...
Listening to it agitates me a great deal...
And sweeps me away in a torrent of envy and unease.

It's very difficult to explain in words...
It's...
Otherwise, I won't be able to confidently pursue my career as a pianist...
I cannot surpass his piano! I want to free myself from this obsessive thaught...
How wouldn't I? I felt exactly the same way about Ajino then...
Dad under-stands.
No...
Is to surpass Ichinose Kai...
Your only optian left...
If that's the case, Shuhei...

That's why I came to Warsaw.
That's exactly what I intend to do, Dad.
SOFITEL
VICTORIA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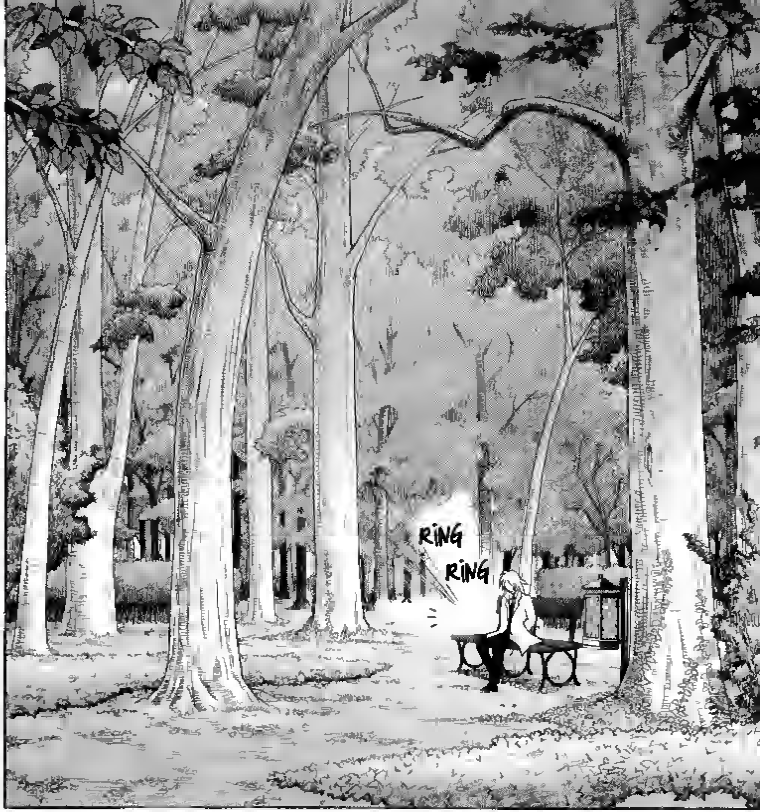
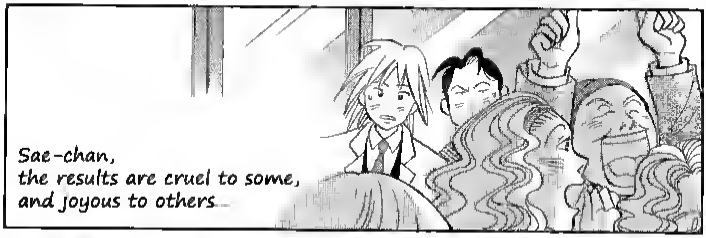
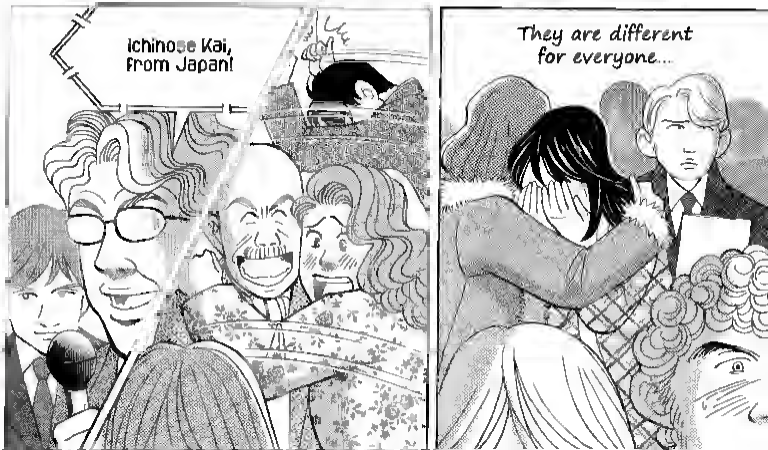

RING
RING

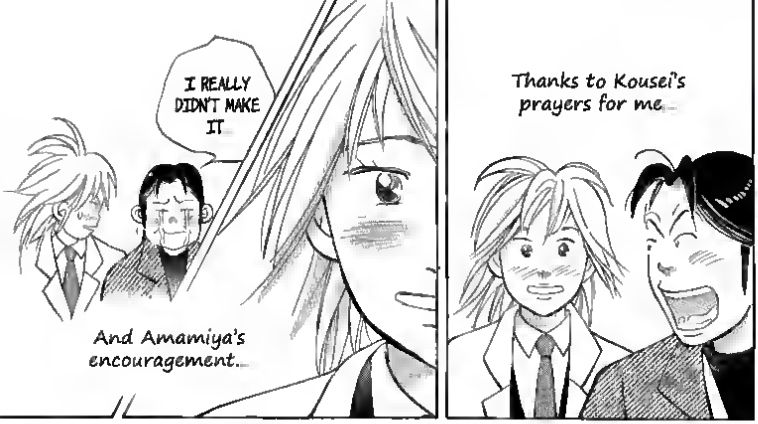
Where are you, Kai?
Huh? The forest?
Isn't it almost night time already? Chopin's forest?
What are you doing there?!

The deliberation is still in progress, but you'd better come here quickly!
Weren't they gonna release it tomorrow?
CHOPINA
Nope- Luckily I've got Kai's number!
They're gonna release the candidate list for the second round today!
Oh...
Ok, right away!
Anyway, just hurry!
That was just a tentative schedule!
Alec Lonquizon, from France!

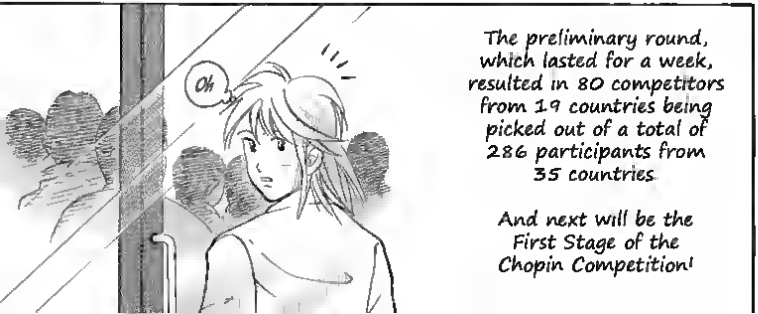
It's just started.
Hurry, hurry!
Run, Kai!

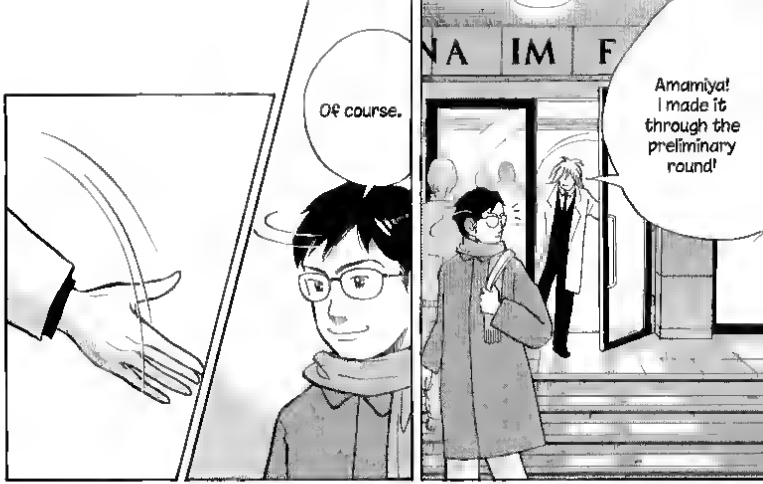

Sae-chan,
the results are cruel to some,
and joyous to others...

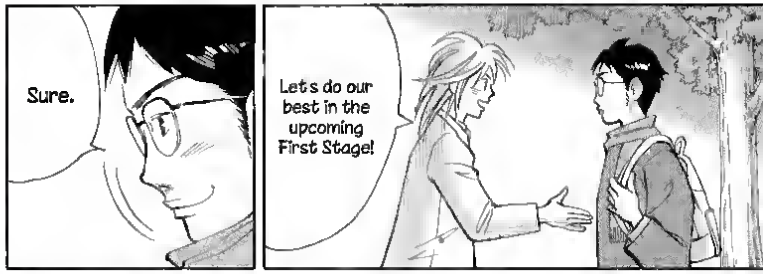

Ichinose Kai,
from Japan!
They are different
for everyone...


I REALLY DIDN'T MAKE IT
And Amamiya's encouragement...
Thanks to Kousei's prayers for me...

Woohoo! I made it!
Ham-burger.


Oh
The preliminary round, which lasted for a week, resulted in 80 competitors from 19 countries being picked out of a total of 286 participants from 35 countries.
And next will be the First Stage of the Chopin Competition!


Amamiya! I made it through the preliminary round!
Of course.


Let's do our best in the upcoming First Stage!
Sure.

握手 END
第13巻につづく